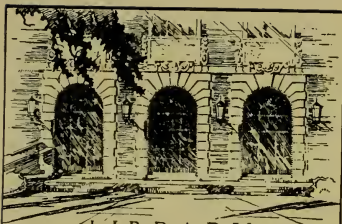


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THE

HERITAGE OF LANGDALE.

A *Nobel*.

BY

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WILTON'S WEIRD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1877.

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THE HERITAGE OF LANGDALE.



CHAPTER I.

EITHER Captain Langley's toilette occupied an unusual length of time, or some other cause of delay had arisen, for it was one whole minute after the time appointed by Lady Helmsford to set out for Lord Chedworth's select party when he reached her door.

"My lady is gone, sir," said the footman who opened it; "just gone."

Harold's face clouded over. This was scant courtesy, and looked not unlike a design to throw him over, or, as modern speech would have it, "to leave him out in the cold."

However, Harold was determined not to submit to be thus balked of an entertainment which had been the groundwork of much boasting. The Langleys, right or left of the line, were never deficient in pluck. 'Tis true he had been included in Lady Helmsford's invitation—as if he were to be of her following—nevertheless he would not hesitate to present himself alone. So, returning to his coach, he directed the driver to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and in gathering wrath against the Countess and his *fiancée*, he jolted and bumped away to that aristocratic locality.

Meantime Mistress Letitia Sparrow, being a sociable soul and given to hospitality, had taken advantage of the unusual circumstance that the Countess and her niece had gone out together, to invite Mistress Dorothy and Master Chifferil to tea in an apartment which she considered her sitting-room, but which, in the Countess's mind, was allotted to the occupation of two exceedingly ugly and evil-disposed pug-dogs, who were especially under the care of Mistress Letitia. They had their meals there when the Countess was out or

indisposed for their society ; for in truth that great lady was not by nature inclined to pets ; but never behind the fashion, she duly added china monsters and hideous pugs to her animate and inanimate furniture when the mode demanded it. There also were their respective baskets, mats, blankets, and all possible provision for their comfort ; for if their superb mistress was somewhat indifferent ; they had awakened the liveliest interest in the sensitive heart of Mistress Letitia ; and it must be admitted that towards her they showed whatever of love and gratitude existed in their cynical nature—for rare is the doggish heart in which more or less of both are not to be found—oftener more than less.

On this occasion, then, this apartment was swept and garnished. The warm stuff curtains were let down from the heavy festoons in which it was then the fashion to loop them ; the fire blazed merrily : the carved oaken presses—which nowadays would fetch a high price in Wardour Street, but which had been thrust away there as too cumbersome and unsightly for the grander rooms—reflected back the light from surfaces as

bright as beeswax and elbow-grease could make them.

The centre table was laid with a set of dainty cups and saucers, and an exquisitely-painted teapot with a silver spout, which had been discarded by my lady for one of real Chinese china in the shape of a toad ; cakes of all descriptions and sweetmeats in little cut-glass dishes furnished forth a tempting array ; and Mistress Sparrow tripped to and fro, adding final touches to the feast, attired in her favourite mixture of pea-green and pink, rouged, patched, and powdered to the exact point of fashion.

Mistress Dorothy—in a sober costume of black silk, somewhat brown and darned, but well preserved, and lightened by a fichu of good white lace folded neatly over the bosom, black-lace mittens on her hands, a lace cap over her rebellious grey hair, and a white-lace apron—stood by the fire.

“ I think we may as well sit down,” said Mistress Sparrow. “ I did ask Master Chifferil to join our tea-table, but he is late. Master Chifferil is really a man of parts and much information ; indeed, he ever shows me respect

and observance, as if he was aware that I was somewhat above the common. How different from the presumption and forwardness of my lady's woman—Mistress Beville—who is really quite an ignorant low sort of creature, only my lady's notice has well-nigh turned her head; 'tis indeed marvellous how the Countess spoils her. Heigho! I cannot boast *her* arts—even Master Chifferil is quite aware of the difference between us. I only fear I do not reciprocate his consideration as I ought," concluded Mistress Sparrow, smiling with her head on one side as she placed a dish of strawberry preserve cornerways with mathematical precision.

"To be sure he's a nice little crature," returned Dorothy, who had kept a tinge of her native accent, notwithstanding her long expatriation; "I wonder would nothing fatten him—" Her conjectures were stopped by a modest tap at the door, and Chifferil himself entered.

"Ladies, your most obedient," he bowed low. "I greatly fear I am a few minutes behind time—for which, my amiable Mistress Sparrow, I do entreat your pardon; but the

truth is, I was detained by a consultation with Master Hobson, the butler; he wished my advice respecting a young man who offered himself for the place of poor Truscott."

"What has come to him?" asked Mistress Dorothy as they placed themselves at table.

"Only last night, leaving the Duchess of Beaulieu's rout, some fellows picked a quarrel with the poor young man and broke his head. He is obliged to lie up, and is gone to lodge with a friend. However he is most desirous of not losing her ladyship's service, and has sent an acquaintance here to-day to entreat Hobson to take him as *locum tenens* till Truscott is able to resume his duties."

"Dear, dear! what a business it was, to be sure! My lady was in a rare temper about it; I believe she offered a reward for the discovery of whoever injured her servant."

"She wished to do so, madam, but on my persuasion desisted. You see, mesdames, the culprits would have sworn that Truscott began the fight and only had the punishment he deserved. My lady manages to have much her own way, but not everything."

“Pray, sir, is your tea sweet enough?”

“I do not think Mistress Sparrow has looked into it,” replied the gallant Chifferil.

“La, sir! that is indeed a civil way of saying ’tis not. And,” continued Mistress Sparrow, as she gracefully extended a somewhat skinny arm to drop another lump of sugar into Chifferil’s cup, “what has Master Hobson decided?”

“Contrary to my advice he hath engaged this young spark. I do not quite like his looks—but what with compassion for Truscott and some consideration concerning wages, Hobson has been overcome; so the new lackey is to enter on his service to-morrow.”

“Mistress Dorothy, you eat nothing, ma’am. Pray let me recommend these muffins; our cook hath a rare gift for most cakes, specially these buttered sort. How sweet your young lady did look, to be sure, as she went out just now. I think her simple gown of Indian muslin and white silk, and all that delicate point d’Alençon on the bodice, with naught save a white rose in her hair, became her rarely—only she is a thought colourless.”

“And no wonder,” exclaimed Dorothy, setting down her cup with vehemence. “Look at the life she leads! Mewed up all day in hot rooms; ’tis like a fight for life to get leave to breathe the air. Then we never know from day to day what is to become of us. My lady is very good and generous, but if she took the turn she might bundle us back to that dark divil Langley any day. I’m told he might take me darlin’ whenever he likes; and, mark my words, the uncertainty is killing her.”

“Then she does not like her *fiancé*, Captain Langley?” simpered Mistress Sparrow, as she refilled Dorothy’s cup. “Do you know it is whispered she is already married to him, only a former wife or some such thing turned up, so they are temporarily separated.”

“That’s all lies,” cried Dorothy uncompromisingly.

“Come now, dear Mistress Dorothy,” said Letitia in her most imploring and persuasive accents, “do tell us the facts about this marriage—for there was a something, eh?”

“There’s a ‘something’ every day,” re-

turned Dorothy stoutly, "but I have nothing to tell about a marriage. The rubbish that gossips invent isn't worth a sensible woman's while to listen to."

"Well, Mistress Dorothy, I hope I am not a gossip!" exclaimed Mistress Sparrow, with an offended air.

"Is it you!" cried Mistress Dorothy, with a short laugh. "Troth! not at all—only maybe you listen to gossips sometimes."

"I am sure," quoth Chifferil, hastening to pour oil on the troubled waters, "I am sure Mistress Sparrow's native goodness and refinement forbid her to share the vulgar taste for gossip."

"I declare, sir, you are vastly too polite. But tell me, good Mistress Dorothy, was your young lady not surrounded by admirers in France?"

"I'd like to see the one that would come near her while she was in Madam Wandesford's care—or mine neither. I don't like the way you have in this country of letting young men—ay, and old ones too—talk nonsense to girls that are scarce out of the nursery, till they don't know if they are on their heads or

their heels. There was no one near us there in the old château of rank enough to come near my lord's daughter. No more tea, I thank you, but just the least taste in life of the muffins, they are mighty fine."

At this stage of the proceedings the door cautiously opened, and a black head with gleaming eyes and teeth intruded itself.

"Is Massa Chifferil in here?" said Gomez, and at his voice the two pugs, Mab and Tab, who had hitherto slumbered peacefully, flew from the hearthrug with frantic barkings—having a deep and irreconcilable hatred to the negro. He bent his woolly head and twisted his features into a hideous grimace which made the little animals still more furious, although they barked at a safe distance, turning their little snubby heads and indignant eyes every minute or two to Mistress Letitia, as if to say, "Why don't you put him out?"

"Hush, Mab! be quiet, Tab—there's no hearing oneself speak," cried Mistress Sparrow. "Yes, Gomez. Master Chifferil is here; what do you want?"

"Massa Chifferil, gemplum wants to see

you. Walk in, sar." Whereupon, with a droll triumphant look, he threw the door open, and, to poor Chifferil's horror, ushered in D'Arcy, who, stopping just within the entrance, executed three grave deep bows.

It was indeed D'Arcy, but considerably changed and improved; his clothes were good, glossy, and well-fitting, of a deep bottle-green, slightly ornamented by black silk lace; his head covered with a solemn stiffly-curved wig, such as were affected by grave men of business; his long sinewy lower limbs covered by black woollen stockings, and plain silver buckles in his high-quartered shoes.

"I greatly fear my presence is an intrusion," said D'Arcy in his curious, solemn, singing kind of speech. "I wanted a few words of business with Master Chifferil, but I did not reckon on finding him in grand company."

"Sir," replied Mistress Letitia, curtsying with much elegance and urbanity, "Master Chifferil's friend is very welcome."

"Oh! a—a—Mr. a—" hesitated the wretched Chifferil, whose very wig vibrated with horror at this apparition.

“D’Arcy,” put in that imperturbable personage. “I promised to let you know when there was a good chance of snapping up some South Sea stock—so—”

“Oh yes, exactly! but I shall have a few words with you on business matters presently—we must not trouble the ladies with such uninteresting topics.”

“His stockbroker, my dear!” whispered Letitia to Dorothy. “Knows what he is about, does little Mr. Chifferil.”

“As you like, sir, as you like,” returned D’Arcy.

“Would the gentleman take a cup of tea now?” asked Mistress Sparrow sweetly.

“I thank you, madam. ’Tis a beverage I’m not partial to. I have ever preferred Tokay to Bohay. I will just await my respected friend’s pleasure to discuss the matters I have called about.”

“Certainly! I will come with you now,” exclaimed Chifferil, rising nervously.

“What! and leave the tay and the ladies! I am ashamed of you, Master Chifferil.”

“*I’m* in no hurry—it’s not every day I get into such charming company;” this was said

with the utmost gravity, but a curious twinkle in his dark and rather sunken eyes might have suggested to a shrewd observer that he enjoyed the little secretary's confusion.

"Pray sit down, sir," was Mistress Letitia's practical reply to the polite speech. "I have no doubt we can find refreshment more suited to your taste. Be quiet, Tab! I shall have to whip you, Mab!" for the pugs kept sniffing unpleasantly round D'Arcy's legs, breaking out into relapses of barking every now and then.

"These are mighty pretty little bastes, ma'am," said he, drawing a chair to the table and depositing his hat on the carpet beside him, "and as fat as porposes. Ah! ye'd get a long price for them in many a place I've been in."

Perhaps by some mystic intuition Tab divined the source of this admiration, for he suddenly lifted up his nose and howled discordantly.

"Dear, dear! I never did know those dogs half so troublesome," cried Mistress Letitia, pouring out some cream for each of them.

"They would so, sir!" said Dorothy, who

had not spoken since the stranger had entered, but had gazed at him intently with a startled look ; “the poor cratures at Limerick would have made a grand meal on them the time of the siege.”

D’Arcy looked at her with earnestness equal to her own, a quick glance of recognition coming into his eyes ; but he gave a short warning shake of the head and a nod in the direction of Mistress Letitia, whose back was towards them, as she opened a cupboard to set forth a flask of strong waters, which she thought might suit Master D’Arcy’s taste more than tea.

“Exactly, ma’am — or at Londonderry, where they were put to sore straits. Sure, Master Chifferil, you are in luck, sir, to have so kind and obliging a lady to receive your friends. Is she your daughter now ?”

“Oh ! dear me, Master D’Arcy, that is a bad compliment to pay our friend,” simpered Mistress Letitia, greatly flattered, “though I am sure we all look on Master Chifferil as a stay to the house—especially when my lady is away. Try a piece of cake, Master D’Arcy ; it’s bad drinking without food.”

D'Arcy gravely accepted.

"Well, sir, I hope the stock continues to rise," said Chifferil uneasily, to change the conversation.

"It does—it does," returned D'Arcy, as soon as he had disposed of a large mouthful of cake. "I have some memoranda to show you which will induce you to go deeper into the undertaking, or I am much mistaken. What do you say, ladies? Are you inclined to try for a fortune?"

"I am sure, sir, the few pounds I have managed to save would not go far to lay the foundation," said Mistress Sparrow.

"And I have nothing I can call my own," said Dorothy, with a sigh.

"Pooh!" returned the gallant D'Arcy, refilling his glass. "It is the duty of gentlemen to work for the ladies, and so you ought not to trouble yourselves."

"I am sure, sir, that is the sentiment of a gentleman and a soldier," said Mistress Sparrow, smiling graciously upon him; "and a soldier I am sure you have been—any one could see that."

"Soldiering is a quare training for Change

Alley," remarked Dorothy, a little querulously.

"I'm not so sure of that," returned D'Arcy. "There's fighting in both, and it's hard to say which sort is the bitterest."

"Suppose," said Chifferil, who looked most unhappy, "we retire to my cabinet, where I can look at your papers and—"

"All in good time," replied the imperturbable intruder. "Here we are, a nice little quartette—why should we not have a game of whist?"

"Why not?" cried Dorothy, who had had a long fast from cards—a means of amusement highly disapproved by Madam Wandesford, but which Dorothy had nevertheless often surreptitiously enjoyed with the intendant of the château, as the excellent woman was by no means spiritually-minded.

Her "why not?" was cordially echoed by Mistress Sparrow, who desired the young woman in waiting to clear away the tea, leave the flask and cake; and the wretched Chifferil was forced to take his part in the rubber, which was gravely continued with varying fortunes. In the course of it D'Arcy uttered

an occasional exclamation in French, as if excited by the chances of the game. The first time he did so Dorothy looked up quickly, but after rather bent down her head each time he spoke in that language.

At last D'Arcy rose. "Now you must not be keeping me any longer," he exclaimed, to Chifferil's great surprise. "It is hard to leave pleasant company, but I must not be too late in getting back to the city. I will show you the share list if you like."

"Come with me then," said Chifferil, with great alacrity.

Mistress Sparrow arranged herself in an attitude favourable to the execution of an elegant curtsy, when Mistress Dorothy stepped forward, and said, with some little hesitation :

"I am sure I am among friends, so I need not have been so cautious. There is a thrifle I have scraped together and kept very careful. Now if this good gentleman could double it for me, as he and Master Chifferil were speaking about, why I would be as plaised as Punch."

"Very good, ma'am."

"Then if you will come with me to my

mistress's sitting-room, I will give you—the—the—”

“The cash,” put in D’Arcy, seeing her hesitate, “and I will write you a receipt. I see, Master Chifferil, ’tis a recommendation to be your man of business.”

“Dear, dear ! perhaps I had better venture too,” cried Mistress Letitia.

“Maybe I won’t have any shares to dispose of ; but I’ll let you know, madam—I’ll let you know,” replied D’Arcy.

“Come with me then, sir,” said Dorothy ; “I will not keep you long.”

When Dorothy reached the apartment occupied by Maud, she hastily lit the candles which stood upon the mantelpiece from the one she herself carried, and then turned to look keenly at D’Arcy.

“You know me, Dorothy Kean,” he said.

“Ay, that I do—that I do,” she returned in a carefully suppressed voice, and stretching out both hands.

He took and held them for a minute, during which both kept silence and looked sadly at each other ; then Dorothy withdrew hers, and sitting down on a low ottoman, leant her

elbows on her knees and covered her face with her hands, rocking herself to and fro.

“Ah!” she exclaimed at length, “I never thought to have looked upon your face again, and now it brings back to me the dear dead, and my youth, and those sad bitter times of mortal fear! Yet how pleased I am to see ye, D’Arcy!”

“And I to see you, mavourneen,” he returned, with wonderful kindness.

“I thought you were dead—long ago!” resumed Dorothy. “Where have you been, and what brings you here, at all at all?”

“As to where I’ve been,” returned D’Arcy, leaning against the mantelpiece, and speaking in his usual manner, “it would take me a week to tell. I have some private business with that poor crature, Chifferil, and little thought to find you here. Times are not hard with you, Dorothy—what are you doing here?”

“I am own woman to the young Lady Langdale,” replied Dorothy, with much importance.

D’Arcy uttered an exclamation in some foreign tongue.

“ Ah, D’Arcy ! do you remember when I last met you, near Paris, ten years ago ? I had a darlin’ little girl by the hand, and you were footsore and starving; you had been wounded and robbed.”

“ I do well remember.”

“ Then that little girl is she who ought to be Baroness Langdale ; and the good gentleman who took you in, and fed you, and gave you money to go on your way to find some one you knew at Brest, was her father—Lord Langdale. I don’t think I told you his name then, we had so much to talk about.”

“ Do you tell me this in truth ? Begad ! I am more the young lady’s servant than ever !”

“ What do you mean, D’Arcy ?” with sudden inspiration. “ Was it you sent her the note last week ? tell me truth and no lie. Do you know who passed himself off as the bridegroom ? Ah ! spake the truth D’Arcy.”

“ Note !—no, I never heard of any note ; and, Dorothy, last week I thought I knew who the fellow was that stood in young Langley’s shoes, but I was mistaken. ’Tis

all a mystery ; but no note did I ever hear of—now that is God's truth."

"This is the strangest turn ! Tell me, asthore, what do ye know about the marriage ?"

"Next to nothing ; but keep a good heart, my woman. Your lady has a strong watchful friend keeping guard over her—and that is all, I dare say."

"That same is not much," cried Dorothy. "Ah ! ye must go, my old comrade—ye must go ! I dare not seem to know you here ; but where—where can I find you if my lady or myself want help ?"

"You will always hear of me if you send to Lamb's Coffee House, Lamb's Court, off Holborn, and ask for 'The Blazer.'"

"Ah ! how will I find it in this great bewildering town ?"

"Ask Chifferil. He's a fellow you can trust, I believe."

"God only knows who is to be trusted, D'Arcy ! And are you really a respectable man in that place they are all talking about—Change Alley ?"

"I always was respectable," returned

D'Arcy solemnly; "but as to Change Alley, I have as much call there as you have need for shares, Mistress Dorothy."

"Well, you mustn't stay longer," she said, "or that queer little soul, Mistress Sparrow, will be opening her eyes. Ah! come back and let me see you, D'Arcy, again."

"I will," he returned, "but not for a bit; and, Dorothy, my woman, be careful, don't let on to know me, unless you want help very bad; and then, better learn the way to Lamb's Court, and come yourself."

"But, D'Arcy, I never could leave my dear child, if there was danger about."

"Then bring her, too!" he exclaimed impressively; "she would be safer with old Robilliard than in many a nobleman's house."

"Who's Robilliard?"

"The landlord of Lamb's. Ask for him when you go, and he will know where I am."

"Lamb's Court, Holborn," repeated Dorothy. "Then good-night, D'Arcy, and God bless you."

"God bless you," he returned, and shook her hand.

“You will most likely meet Master Chifferil in the room below, where we had tea. Stay, I will light you down.”

This she did in silence, uttering another brief “Good-night, and God be with you,” as they reached the door.

D’Arcy found Mistress Sparrow busily arranging the respective couches of Mab and Tab, who, tolerably accustomed by this time to the objectionable stranger, mildly testified their disapprobation by a series of bitter whining growls.

“Now, sir,” said D’Arcy to Chifferil, who, in a state of the utmost nervous irritation, was pacing the room, “I have settled my business with that good lady, and I’m at *your* service.”

“Madam, I have the honour to wish you good-night, with many thanks for your elegant hospitality.”

“Good-evening, my dear Mistress Sparrow,” exclaimed Chifferil with great alacrity.

“Good-night, gentlemen,” simpered Letitia, “and perhaps Master D’Arcy will give me another opportunity of purchasing a few shares—or one.”

“Certainly, madam—at present what I have are bespoke,” returned D’Arcy dryly.

“Follow me, then,” said Chifferil, and led the way to his own little den, which was on the ground-floor at the back of the mansion. Closing the door carefully, and setting the candle on the mantelpiece, Chifferil threw himself into a chair and heaved a deep sigh.

“My good sir,” he said, “my very good sir, may I ask what induced you to run so fearful a risk as to come here openly? I have had my heart in my mouth ever since I saw you.”

“Because I came with a message from my noble commander!”

“But suppose my lady—”

“I knew she was out,” said D’Arcy; “besides I never knew where that thief of the world, Gomez, was leading me till I walked right on top of your elegant tay-table. Now here’s me business—Don Juan desired me to tell you that he has been obliged to send the ‘lame beggar’ abroad; moreover, he has been watched, so you must be particularly careful. The Don doesn’t think there will be much to fear for some days, so long as my lady

the Countess keeps Mistress Langley with her."

"Surely she has no thought of giving her up to John Langley and his son!"

"That you best know. I have delivered Don Monteiro's message; and, look you, Master Chifferil, don't put yourself all of a shake if I come in to ask for instructions touching your shares: a bold front carries you over many an obstacle. Now, have you any word for my captain?"

"Only a few lines," returned Chifferil, seating himself at the table and writing hastily. As soon as he had finished and folded the note D'Arcy took it, and wishing Chifferil a brief good-night, departed.

The secretary looked after him, while he slowly rubbed his hands together and murmured to himself: "How will it all end? Langley has legal power and great interest. My lady is doubtful—no one knows save myself, how doubtful—and I am not sure if the Spanish gentleman's help will be of much avail. 'Tis a rare tangle, would I could have kept out of it; but I could not. I have not properly digested a meal since I had his first

letter saying he was in town and wherefore." So muttering, Chifferil sat down to toast his shins with a discomfited expression of countenance.

Meantime, to revert to Lord Chedworth's drum.

When Maud had dressed and obeyed her aunt's summons to descend, as it was time to set out, she was greatly surprised to find her standing by the fire in the dining-room—the table being partly covered with fruits and richly-cut glass decanters, evidently the last stage of a late dinner—and on the back of a high chair leant Don Juan di Monteiro, in his usual costume of black velvet, costly lace, and diamond buckles. Both were laughing and talking in apparently high spirits.

The sound jarred on Maud, who was somewhat depressed. The days which had intervened since her expedition to the Park had been peculiarly lonely. Although her aunt had several times sent for her to assist in receiving visitors they had been most uncongenial, and she had been treated in the most marked manner as Harold Langley's *fiancée*;

he himself being generally present and playing the part of lover with insolent pretension. She had, on both the last occasions when sent for, pleaded headache, and was greatly relieved to find the excuse admitted. The weather, too, had been wet, and she had no excuse for even asking to go out, so that her spirits were not in tune for the scene which awaited her.

Lady Helmsford's grand beauty was set forth by a magnificent dress of rose-colour brocaded with silver, diamonds in her ears, at her throat, and sparkling amongst her thick black tresses mixed with damask roses and green leaves. She looked unusually well, an air of triumph sat on her brow, and as Maud—oppressed by a sense of her difficulties in having to combine obedience to her aunt's wishes as regarded Monteiro with a due amount of politeness—approached somewhat timidly, she felt in some indescribable manner crushed by her aunt's splendour.

“Come here, child,” said the Countess. “Don Juan has prayed me to take him with us to Lord Chedworth's—though he refused the invitation originally. We do not look for

these variations in the nobler sex. I fear me, sir, you are not constant!"

"Most constant, madam, when once I really attach myself," returned Monteiro, with a deep bow to Maud as she stood, so slender and delicately fair, in the shadow of her aunt's magnificence, like a pale Provence rose.

"Suppose, Maud, we start at once, as your cavalier has not yet arrived, and take mine," a gay glance at Monteiro, "instead. Our number would be still the same, and I doubt if my Lord Chedworth will know who is who, provided you are there."

"I should indeed be glad if you will do so, dear aunt," said Maud simply and earnestly, but the words had scarce passed her lips when she would have fain recalled them. Monteiro, it is true, bowed his thanks in silence; but never before had she met such a glance as that which gleamed for an instant in his quick dark eyes—it was a sudden revelation that infinitely alarmed her.

"On my word, Captain Langley had need be flattered, and you too, sir," said the Countess, with something of sarcasm in her tone. "Let

us go then," she added, giving her hand to Monteiro, who led her, with the solemn courtesy of the period, to her carriage.

The way seemed both long and rugged, as the condition of London streets at that day was something painful to journey over ; nor were they any more safe than passable. However, my Lady Helmsford had a proper following of stout servants armed with staffs, and sat serenely superior to the terrors that pressed upon wretches of inferior quality.

As soon as the rumour of Lady Helmsford's arrival reached his ears, Lord Chedworth hastened to receive his fair guests with almost regal honours, for he met them at the foot of the staircase, and led the Countess with *debonnaire* courtesy to the reception-room—Maud being obliged to follow with Monteiro, who addressed one or two observations to her in French, which were so coldly received that he took refuge in silence, gazing at her from time to time with a grave puzzled expression.

On reaching the first of a suite of rooms the host turned with a questioning look and said, " I thought young Captain Langley was to have accompanied your ladyship ?"

“He was not in time, so we brought Don Juan di Monteiro in his place,” returned the Countess, smiling.

“I am gratified the gallant Don has rescinded his resolution not to honour me with his company,” said the courteous host; “still I cannot but sympathise with the poor young captain’s disappointment — though how he came not to be before instead of after time on such an occasion passes me. Ah! fairest Mistress Langley, were it my lot to boast the proud distinction your cousin claims, you would see—”

“Claims, my lord, do not imply necessarily the right of the claimant,” interrupted Monteiro, with animation; “and one great charm of English society to me, is the freedom of choice permitted to the young demoiselles.”

“A freedom which is barely nominal,” said the Countess.

“But which is only just and right,” remarked Maud in a low tone.

Her aunt looked surprised and displeased.

“Indeed,” whispered Lord Chedworth, “is it possible that hearts exist hard enough

to force your choice ! would it were mine to set you free !”

Maud could not resist the sense of absurdity which the old nobleman’s languishing air and impassioned look called up ; she laughed sweetly, frankly—so that none could take offence—and said, still smiling, “ I imagine all Lady Helmsford’s friends must know what measure of freedom is accorded to me.”

“ Come then, mesdames,” cried Lord Chedworth, “ let me have the honour of directing your notice to what poor specimens of china I have been able to collect.”

At that instant a footman announced “ Captain Harold Langley.”

“ Give me your arm, Don Juan, we will pass on,” said Lady Helmsford.

Lord Chedworth, of course, turned to receive his guest, and Maud, deserted by her aunt, remained beside him.

“ I had feared you had forgotten your engagement,” observed the host, after the usual punctilious salutations had passed.

“ And I feared I had been forgotten by my party, my lord,” said the young man, fighting

hard with a scowl. "I was scarce a minute late, yet Lady Helmsford had already set out. You must not set me down as a recreant, fair cousin! I would not, you well know, willingly miss one moment of your sweet company."

"No, cousin Harold," said she, drawing instinctively closer to her host, "I think that in real truth we love not each other's company! Is it not better always to be true, my lord?"

"Yes, dear lady—wise as you are fair; but, indeed you must not deal too hardly with your kinsman—see, he is overwhelmed. Come, sir, we were about to make a slight inspection of a few objects of curiosity—pray accompany us." So saying he offered his hand to Maud, who gladly took it, and they proceeded through the suite of handsomely furnished rooms to one at the end, where a rare display of china, carved ivory, and Venetian glass was set forth.

When Don Juan di Monteiro found himself carried away by the imperious Countess he felt furious with her, himself, Langley, and above all the irresistible laws of conven-

tionality, which compelled him to obey her proposition.

“Let them fight it out between them, my dear Juan,” said Lady Helmsford, laughing lightly, “while we examine our noble host’s collection.”

“Yes! but is it quite right to desert that poor young lady, and leave her to Langley’s platitudes, which evidently bore her to death?”

“That ‘poor young lady’ seems to have no lack of champions,” returned the Countess tartly; “Lord Chedworth will divide the task of boring her, and perhaps two bores may neutralise each other.”

“Truly, madam, I wonder that a lady so clever and powerful as yourself can permit your fair niece to be thus persecuted.”

“Monteiro! you do not understand our laws. If I were openly to oppose him, John Langley would reclaim his ward, and I could not hinder him. But I have laid my plans. The suit in the Ecclesiastical Court to set aside this marriage shall be gone into as soon as—well, as soon as possible—and then I think Maud had much better wed our good host.”

“And this is freedom of choice,” cried Monteiro.

“My dear friend, there is no such thing! *I* had none. A girl is better without it. What can she know of her own mind? of life—of—Ah! believe me, 'tis the love of the ripe woman who has seen and known, and with matured taste and judgment makes her choice, that is the best, the most flattering—and most calculated to bestow bliss!”

This speech was accompanied by a glowing smile, downcast eyes, and a slight pressure of the hand in which her own lay, but nevertheless it only elicited a very abrupt “Perhaps so” from Monteiro, who with difficulty repressed far different words, and who no doubt, had Moore written a century earlier, would have quoted, “Give me back the wild freshness of morning.”

“And why do you not go on with this suit? You would be better free from so troublesome a charge.”

“Because—well—of course there is some difficulty with John Langley; but then that silly girl refuses to be a party to it. However, she must yield.”

“This is very strange,” said the Spaniard. “But look, Lady Helmsford, here is a most dainty monster.” Monteiro pointed, as he spoke, to a large squat sort of toad-dragon, with a twisted tail of green and gold, fiery-red jaws, and a backbone of purple-blue.

“It is indeed rare,” cried the Countess with great animation. “Has your Grace,” she added, addressing a stately lady who politely made way for her to approach this work of art, “has your Grace seen this charming collection before?”

“No!” returned the Duchess of B——, who, with her daughter, was among the guests; “and I must say I am somewhat envious of my Lord Chedworth. I flattered myself I had a dragon teapot unsurpassed, but *this* puts mine quite in the shade.”

A short but lively colloquy ensued respecting the merits of Indian *versus* real China—as the ceramic productions of the celestial empire were called, at the end of which her Grace moved to the irresistible card-room, and Lady Helmsford, looking round, missed Monteiro. An expression of extreme surprise came over her face, but she was immediately addressed by

some of the numerous fine gentlemen ever ready to win a word, or a smile, from the handsome modish Countess, and some time elapsed before she met the truant.

Meanwhile Lord Chedworth had conducted Maud and her cousin to a smaller inner chamber, exclusively given to some more exquisite and select specimens than those in the larger apartment. Maud, whose eye and taste had been formed on good models during her long sojourn in France, was greatly charmed with some Indian and Venetian articles, and listened with real interest to all Lord Chedworth had to say on the subject, while Harold endured the talk with as polite an exterior as he could manage to present—being an ingrained barbarian, scantily lacquered with a coat of varnish.

“I know not why it is,” said Maud to her elderly admirer, “but I cannot admire these great ugly monsters which are so much valued now.”

“Your taste, being superior, is naturally opposed to the giddy throng.”

“I am not so sure, my lord, that the greater number is not more likely to be right

than the individual. However, I can but express my real taste."

"I can never imagine Mademoiselle anything save faithful and true," said Monteiro in French, as he at that moment joined them.

Maud looked grave and kept silence, determined to have as little as possible to say to him.

"Exactly so, sir," returned Lord Chedworth, who was an unusually accomplished man, and had a hazy sort of knowledge of French, partly guessing that a compliment had been uttered. "I was just indicating to Mistress Langley those objects most worth her notice. You have been a great traveller, sir, my Lady Helmsford tells me; can you say if this is a piece of genuine Japan work?"

"I know nothing of Eastern lands," said Monteiro, coming forward and taking a sort of circular gold plaque enriched with dull green stones from Lord Chedworth, "and, alas! I am very ignorant of art—but," looking at it earnestly, "this is not from Japan, or any Eastern country. This is Mexican work."

"Indeed! I had no idea such things existed there!"

“Oh! there was a strange rare kind of civilisation there once; and bits of marvelously delicate workmanship fall into our hands sometimes.”

“Our hands!” said Harold rudely. “That is somewhat ambiguous. May I ask whose?”

“Mine!” said Monteiro, turning and looking at him so straight and so fiercely, that Harold was quieted for a while, “mine—and those of the men who served under my command.”

“Exactly so—exactly so,” said Lord Chedworth, with an elaborately polite bow intended evidently to express his disapprobation of Harold’s tone. “Then this is in truth a rarity?”

“Of much value—at least as a curiosity.”

“The fellow is a buccaneer—trust me—a pirate that ought to be hung,” whispered Harold to Maud.

“Nay, that is impossible!” she returned, with an incredulous smile, looking at the noble air and graceful figure of the Spaniard as he stood talking with their host.

“Fine feathers make fine birds,” remarked Harold. “Come, sweet cousin—let me lead

you to the refreshment-room, and leave my lord and his freebooting friend to babble about crockery."

"I thank you, sir! It would be scarce polite to leave our host who conducted me here. When he is at liberty I will ask him to find my aunt."

Harold stood aside in deep mortification, knowing few persons present, and feeling himself *de trop*. But Lord Chedworth, breaking from his conversation, turned to Maud.

"You have had enough of these dry topics, fair Mistress Langley; let me get you some refreshment."

"I thank you; but first permit me to examine this curious jewelled glass with all the wavy lines."

"Ah, yes! 'tis Venetian, and one of the fabled goblets that break if filled with poisoned wine."

As Lord Chedworth, Maud, and Monteiro closed round the bracket which held the glass, a richly-dressed foppish young man strolled into the room. "Ha! you here, Langley?"

"I thought I told you I was engaged to Lord Chedworth to-night."

“Gad! one has so much to think of, I forgot. Who is the slender beauty in white?”

“My cousin and betrothed—Mistress Maud Langley.”

“Lucky dog!” returned the other, who was Sir Eustace Blount, gazing at her with lazy admiration. “She is a dainty blossom—shows blood too. Give ye joy, Langley! No use in asking you to try your luck at picquet?”

“Why, yes! to attend one’s *fiancée* is about as animating an occupation as making love to one’s wife. Have with you for what game you like,” cried Harold, infinitely relieved to find a congenial companion, and one, too, of undoubted rank and fashion. The two young men therefore retired to the card-room, and when Maud looked up from her examination of the Venetian goblet, to her great joy one source of annoyance had disappeared. At this moment an important personage, not in livery, and evidently the butler, approached, and in a solemn suppressed tone addressed the master of the house:

“Lord Sunderland just arrived, my lord.”

“Indeed!” cried Lord Chedworth. “My

dear young lady, you must excuse me for a moment. I want to say a word to Sunderland ; meantime, Don Monteiro, will you see that Mistress Langley has some refreshment ? 'Tis spread in the second room on the right—I will rejoin you there ;" and his lordship walked quickly away.

The colour flushed in Maud's cheek at this involuntary infringement of her aunt's injunctions, for she felt, rather than knew, how serious would be her displeasure. Moreover she was curiously uneasy in Monteiro's company. Why, she could not tell, indeed she scarce acknowledged it to herself. She was always dimly conscious that, unseen by others, he watched her every movement, and listened to every word she uttered—and yet he seemed to be her aunt's suitor ! She would almost have preferred to have been left to Harold's care.

Meantime Monteiro was bowing low before her and offering his hand to lead her to the refreshment-room. The hand Maud laid in his was tremulous, and the bright colour still glowed in her cheek.

"I was fearful when I saw you first this

evening," said Monteiro in a low voice and hesitating manner, very different from his ordinary frank free tone, "that you had been suffering from indisposition since I had the happiness of meeting you in the Park. There was that in your expression——," he paused.

"I thank you, sir! I have been well," replied Maud very coldly.

Monteiro looked up quickly at the sound of her voice, quickly and inquiringly, and then went on speaking, in French, of France, as if endeavouring to lead her back to the friendly and confidential tone that had suddenly and naturally sprung up between them when he last had the chance of speaking with her alone, but in vain; her answers were severely polite, and as short as was consistent with good breeding. Indeed, while Maud was sipping her tea she was reflecting how she could dispense with her cavalier and contrive to reach her aunt. After a short silence in which Monteiro had taken refuge after the last rebuff, he exclaimed, with more of his ordinary manner :

"Madam, be your own frank self, and tell

me how have I been so unfortunate as to offend you ?”

“ You have in no way offended me, Monsieur, nor am I aware that I show any offence.”

“ *Caramba !*” exclaimed Monteiro, “ I am indeed unhappy—you close the door of explanation, while I have scarce a right even to ask wherefore.”

“ I see nothing to explain—and here is Lord Chedworth.”

Maud rose joyfully, and made a step forward to meet her host who was seeking her.

Monteiro, looking very dark and moody, kept aloof, while Lord Chedworth, radiant at the gracious reception accorded him, led his fair guest to the principal drawing-room, where, he whispered, inexorable circumstance compelled him to leave her for awhile in her aunt’s care.

The apartment which Maud now entered was spacious, panelled in white and gold, and richly furnished, though in a heavier and more antique fashion than Lady Helmsford’s grand new mansion. About thirty persons or so were grouped about very effectively, under

the brilliant wax-lights profusely supplied by chandeliers, girandoles, and candelabra. Here were a couple engaged at chess, there a wit in an attitude, with the uplifted pinch of snuff held gracefully, while his red heels were drawn together in the act of bowing, uttered some racy *double entendre*, at which the fine jewelled, powdered, rouged, elegant dames laughed, or spread huge fans to hide the absence of blushes which would not come; on one side were Maccaronis in the last supreme fashion, uttering *very* soft nonsense to simpering listening belles; at the other, a graver and more solid order of gentry, discussing politics and the prospects of South Sea stock. Feathers waved, and fans fluttered; the whole scene a flood of variegated colour; brocades and velvets of every hue; gold and silver embroidery, diamonds, jewels glitter—the men as gorgeous as the women. It was a wonderful magnificence that frothed up to the top of the misery, and poverty, and misrule underlying the fair surface of the great world at the commencement of the Georgian era.

At the side opposite to them, as Maud and

the host entered, her rich dress spread out on a settee, sat Lady Helmsford talking and smiling graciously to a tall distinguished-looking man in a plum-coloured brocade suit richly laced with gold, wearing wrought gold knee and shoe buckles, and a profusely-curled wig. Lady Helmsford slowly opened and shut her fan as she talked with a haughty grace peculiar to her; but Maud could see that through all she looked beyond Lord Chedworth and herself at some object behind them, and that her eye sparkled angrily as she did so.

“I bring you your fair niece,” said Lord Chedworth; and as Maud placed herself beside Lady Helmsford, he added: “I think, my lord, ’tis a lovely illustration of Juno and Psyche!”

The tall gentleman smiled. “It is indeed,” he said; “and this young lady?” he added in a quietly questioning manner to the Countess.

“Ought to be Baroness Langdale,” she returned. “Allow me to present her to you! Maud, this is my Lord Sunderland! I trust your lordship will do something for us, now that you have met the dispossessed one.”

“That would I willingly, madam,” said Lord Sunderland, bowing with kindly graciousness. “But ’tis a curious and confused matter, this ‘Heritage of Langdale.’ Yet it meets me constantly ; every one seems interested in it ! Where,” he continued in a lower tone, while he looked with interest at Maud, “where is young Captain Langley—does your ladyship know him ?”

“Yes — certainly ! he is here, gambling yonder with Sir Eustace Blount.”

“Young men are colder than they were,” said the Earl, laughing. “I know scarce any game that would have drawn me from so fair a mistress at his age.”

“’Tis as well so ; he is no match for my niece,” returned the Countess haughtily. “But you will bear my request in mind, my good lord ?”

“Egad, madam ! I’ll be certain to have my memory jogged ! Scarce a day passes but something reminds me of that mistaken, pleasant, genial fellow, Langdale, and his forfeited estate. I will institute a thorough search for the missing document. And now I must bid your ladyship good-evening ; but

first, can you tell me who is that dark, foreign-looking gentleman in black velvet, talking to the charming Mrs. Ferrars?"

"A Don Juan di Monteiro."

"Ha! a Spaniard! What brings him here?"

"I scarce know; he has, I believe, some English connections and friends about the King, for whose coming he waits. I knew him in Paris, where he was well received."

"Indeed—but I must go! I kiss your ladyship's hand. Fair Mistress Langley, I am your servant." And Lord Sunderland bowed himself gracefully away.

The rest of the evening was a painful confusion to Maud.

She was aware of oppressive attentions from Lord Chedworth, and still more wearisome observance from Harold, who ostentatiously presented his friend Sir Eustace Blount. She was aware that Monteiro spoke often, but interruptedly with the Countess; that there was a perpetual babble of talk and laughter which bewildered her; finally she was released.

The Countess's carriage was announced, and

Monteiro, refusing to return with them, resigned his place to Harold ; but he contrived to hand Maud downstairs, and asked her more than once in French : " Will you not walk again in the Park, when the weather is brighter ? Why will you not answer ? " But Maud kept silence, and at last found refuge in the darkness of their homeward route. Harold endeavoured to keep up a conversation with the Countess ; but all were relieved when they reached St. James's Square.

As Maud stopped a moment behind her aunt, who was saying good-night to Harold, her eye suddenly caught a flash like the ray of a jewel in the glare of the torches carried by their attendants, she looked in the direction from whence it came, and partially descried in the gloomy background a tall dim figure wrapped in a cloak, which was neither that of a link-boy nor a servant.



CHAPTER II.

IT was the evening but one after Lord Chedworth's party. Night had closed in, though it was not late.

The usual frequenters of "Lambs," had gathered within its hospitable portals—much as we have seen them before. Mr. Nathaniel Morley was there in high spirits, and an entirely new suit of clothes—also with replenished pockets, to judge by the large orders he issued to the attendant tapsters, and his lordly swaggering manner. He was laying down the law respecting the prospects of a war with Spain to a select circle of admiring listeners—evidently considering himself the great man of the society there

assembled—when the door opened to admit Monteiro, who was (as usual when he visited Lambs') wrapped in a large loose cloak, which formed an effectual disguise. No one heeded him, and he stood for a moment or two listening to the authoritative harangue of Mr. Morley before summoning one of the waiters, to whom he said shortly :

“Let Robilliard know I am here.”

“Ay, sir; follow me,” returned the man, and ushered him through a side door to the same room where he had supped with Chifferil about three weeks before. It was partially lighted by the blaze of a brave fire, and, as before, Monteiro threw aside his cloak impatiently, and drew near the pleasant warmth.

He looked grave and stern, and for the few minutes that elapsed before Robilliard made his appearance he stood as if rooted to the ground, wrapped in thought. Even the host's entrance did not rouse him till the old man spoke :

“Well, Excellency ! 'tis some days since I have seen or heard of you.”

“Good-even to you, good friend !” exclaimed

Monteiro. "I want some supper, and your company with it. Is D'Arcy here?"

"No, Señor--nor has he been to-day. I will just order supper and return."

When he did so he found that Monteiro had drawn a chair to the fireside, and was half reclining in it, gazing at the glowing coal, still deep in thought. The old man looked at him, but addressed him no more till the supper, consisting of cold but appetising viands and one or two foreign-looking bottles, had been placed on the table.

"Your Excellency is served," said Robilliard, drawing the cork of one of the bottles, at the sound of which Monteiro started from his meditations, and filling a tumbler more than half full, drained it quickly :

"Ha ! Burgundy !" said he, setting down the glass, "and of the right sort. Come, Robilliard, I have scarce eaten to-day ; so supper first, and news after."

Thus saying, he fell-to--yet old Robilliard outdid him as a trencher-man, and the interval of eating did not last long.

"You seem moody to-night, sir," said the landlord, when he laid down his knife and

fork, and Monteiro still kept silence. "All goes well, I hope?"

"So far, yes, old friend; but it is a more difficult and dangerous task than I anticipated. I did not calculate either on all the dangers it involves."

"You don't often think of danger, Excellency."

"Danger to myself—no! Though I don't want to be killed or disabled either for the next six weeks; but the danger of terror is almost as bad as death to a tender delicate girl. The difficulty of protecting her, while I am myself well-nigh powerless; the desperate anxiety, till the King's return gives me my chance of playing out my trump-card, lest things may not go smoothly—lest any accident may throw her again into Langley's hands—all this preys upon me! Every power, male and female, seems leagued against Lord Langdale's daughter; but I will save her yet, cost what it may of life or gold. I will!"

He rose up as he spoke, and paced the room restlessly.

"Ay! John Langley little reckons on the

strength of a strong hatred," said Robilliard complacently.

"Hatred!" repeated Monteiro; then laughing, he returned to the table, and filling a bumper drank it off. "Now, what news, Robilliard?" he said. "I saw and heard that brute Morley as I came through the common room. He has grown prosperous."

"He has," returned the old man, "and of a sudden!—more cautious too in his talk of running away with the heiress he had somehow married. Yet D'Arcy says the plot is not given up."

"Who is this man, and what do you know of him?"

"I have striven to learn all I can. He comes of a decent family, and was once a gentleman, though addicted to all bad courses; was in prison for debt, and escaped; was outlawed; fought at Culloden and elsewhere; and was even mixed up a good deal with the gentlemen smugglers of the south coast. We all know something of the sort of trade that goes on by Langdale and Rye and along there. This was the way he managed to get into the old Priory the time of

the marriage — he, or whoever employed him.”

“Yes ! that may account for much,” replied Monteiro thoughtfully. “I wish D’Arcy were here—I have not seen him for two days, and now I have to show myself at an accursed *ridotto* or some such fandango, so I have not too much time. I say, Robilliard, this is costly work, man—I begin to see the bottom of my treasure-chest. Would to Heaven I had not fooled away so much in Paris, before I dreamed of the task before me !”

“Excellency, what I have is at your service, and I am not penniless. *Mort de ma vie !* I am not penniless.”

“Thanks, my good old comrade, I am not quite at the end of my resources yet ; but, Robilliard, I have staked my *all* on the game I am playing. If I am beaten I only want to secure a retreat ;—promise to give me enough for that, in exchange for my diamond buckles, which help me so wonderfully in this great London world.” And Monteiro laughed—a deep rich-toned jovial laugh.

“Retreat !—quit England ! when from boyhood you longed so much to be an Englishman !”

“Ay, even so ; if I fail now I scarce care to live.”

“Pooh ! life is very sweet at twenty-eight, or thirty, my captain. I suppose if matters go wrong you’ll just try back to the Rover’s career. Ah, *that’s* the life !”

“Never !” cried Monteiro, “never ! I can find work and food, and mayhap more, in some of the various wars now afoot ; but I am not going to fail. *Caramba !* I never dream of failure. However, I may count on you, Robilliard, so far, for funds ?”

“Ay—” Robilliard was beginning, when a cautious yet heavy knock on the door stopped him.

“Who is there ?” said Robilliard, as he partially opened it. “Oh ! come in—come in. We were just speaking of you.”

Whereupon D’Arcy, in his ordinary attire, his trusty rapier by his side, stepped into the room.

“What has become of you, D’Arcy ?” cried Monteiro, with displeasure. “I have neither

seen nor heard from you since the day before yesterday."

"Well, sir," returned D'Arcy, laying aside his hat and casting a longing look at the supper, "I have been mighty busy, I've been promoted; I am now master of the horse to my Lord Morley, and yesterday I was sent to buy some nags at Barnet; not a disagreeable errand, nor unprofitable nayther."

"Explain, explain!" cried Monteiro; "but first sit down, man, and eat; you are looking hungry."

D'Arcy quickly obeyed, both Monteiro and Robilliard attending to his needs; the former at last exclaiming impatiently:

"Gad, D'Arcy! you can't surely stow anything more away even if you stood up. Here, take another glass of wine, and let us hear your news. Who sent you to Barnet?"

"Morley; I tell you he has got money somehow, there's no holding him. The scheme for carrying off Mistress Langley is in full swing, but they are mortally puzzled how to get hold of her. Ye see, my lady the Countess and her following are not to be lightly dealt with."

Monteiro uttered an exclamation or oath under his breath as he stood grasping the back of a chair, his dark keen eyes fixed on the speaker with almost fierce attention.

"They are, as I said, 'puzzled,'" continued D'Arcy. "So you see the word is, to be *ready* night and day for any service; and I was sent to buy six good strong horses fit for draught or saddle, but I could only get four. I might have secured the six had I waited till to-morrow, but I thought you might be looking for me, Señor; besides it will do them no harm to be short of their number."

"Have you no idea who is behind Morley? Who is supplying the sinews of war?" asked Robilliard, filling D'Arcy's glass.

"Why, the villain, the deceiver that married her in Captain Langley's place!"

"Yes, yes! of course! but have you no notion *who* he is?" asked Monteiro eagerly. "Does Morley still pretend to be the husband?"

"Well, he does in a transparent sort of way; who the real man is I cannot get at."

"But go on, D'Arcy; what more of the plan?" urged Monteiro.

“There is not much to tell, for you see, whatever is done will be done in a hurry. We have a carriage and five horses—one is a real good one, I do not know where he came from—in stables behind Hatton Garden; and after to-night we—that is Hardy Stevens and myself—are to be ready any moment, night or day, so maybe I will find it hard to give you warning, sir.”

“But you must—you must!” said Monteiro, who was again pacing the room restlessly. “What is best to do in this juncture? “Warn the Countess! she is in so strange a mood towards her niece that she might make it the excuse for restoring her to John Langley’s charge! I wish to Heaven I had never seen her handsome face! I little thought when I fell in with her in Paris, that she had anything to do with the house of Langdale! Then if John Langley gets scent of it, he will demand his ward back to have her in safe keeping; and then God help them all! Maud—Mistress Langley I mean—will be maddened with fear, and I shall have to slit the throats of both father and son.”

“It might be the simplest way,” said D’Arcy, in a calm and unaffected manner.

“But would not accomplish half my designs! Could I but keep all quiet, sweet Lady Maud under her aunt’s care, and these conspirators at bay for four weeks—nay, but for three—I should have my appeal to the King, and then I have little fear but that all would go well for the heiress—for myself! Well, I have my sword and your promise, old friend!”

“Ay! but, Excellency, you must be recognised yourself?”

“Yes—that of course; but it will not mend my fortunes.”

“But, sirrah!” (to D’Arcy) “where have you been since I sent you to Chifferil? Did you see him?”

“Yes, your honour, and took tay, or rather saw him taking tay, with two very civil gentlewomen, Mistress Sparrow and an old acquaintance of my own, faith! Mistress Dorothy Kean, own woman to Mistress Langley, no less; or my Lady Langdale I ought to say.”

“How!” cried Monteiro, stopping short

and turning to look at D'Arcy ; "*you*, old Cut-and-thrust, drinking tea in such sober company !" he burst into laughter, then suddenly checking himself, he said sternly : "How came you to be so imprudent, man ? You know how straitened I am to find trustworthy agents. How came you to show yourself to the Countess's household when you know I particularly wish you *not* to be identified with me ?"

"Well, you see, Señor, I could not well help it ; that limb of Satan, little Gomez—I don't think he knew me—bundled me right on top of them, just as they were brewing the tay ; and may I never taste a drop of Nantes, if I did not think little Chifferil would have fainted ! any way they were mighty civil. But Mistress Dorothy ! she soon found me out ; she offered to give me some of her savings to buy South Sea stock, so we had a little private talk ;" and D'Arcy gave a solemn preternatural wink, at which, in spite of anger and uneasiness, Monteiro burst again into hearty laughter, throwing himself into a chair as he did so.

"But tell me, D'Arcy," he said, recovering

himself, "who is this Mistress Dorothy? is she fit to be about the person of the noble Baroness? How came you to know her?"

"Is it Dorothy? sure I have known her since she was a slip of a girl! Her father was killed at Limerick—she and a sister of hers were amongst them that escaped by the skin of their teeth. I was able to help them a bit. And Dorothy is come of decent people; the sister is dead and gone—" (D'Arcy stopped for a moment), "but this girl—faith, I had better say elderly female—is true as steel. She would die for her lady. But they are in mortal fear of the fellow that she is married to; Mistress Dorothy asked me to stand by them, and so—" hesitating, "I just told her I might be heard of here."

"Scarcely prudent, D'Arcy. Did you caution her to be secret and careful?"

"Begad, there was no need of that, sir. They are all mortally afeard of the Countess; and, I was near forgetting, Dorothy told me that thief of an impostor has been writing to the young lady."

"Ha!" exclaimed Monteiro, with a sudden

frown. "Did this Dorothy say the purport of the writing?"

"No, sir. She thought I had a hand in it, or she would not have named it; when she found I hadn't she shut her mouth."

"You must run no more risks, D'Arcy—avoid Mistress Dorothy."

"By Saint Jago, sir! I shall have to mind what I am about for the next few days. I shall be expected to be on the alert. Now here's my notion: there is an idea they can snatch up the young lady going into some grand entertainment, or coming out—have the carriage and horses at hand and five or six stout fellows to guard it, thrust her in, whip, spur and away! There is some determined spark behind the scenes and no lack of money."

"I would give half I have left to find out who," exclaimed Monteiro, resuming his restless walking to and fro; then, looking at his watch, "My time is up—I have to return to my lodgings to dress for this confounded ridotto. Remember, D'Arcy, I rely on you for information; however you manage it, you must keep me acquainted with what goes on,

either direct or through our friend here. You are too old a soldier not to be able to contrive this."

"Well, Señor, I will undertake it; but I warn you, be ready for a very sudden route."

"I shall always be ready. But, D'Arcy, I would not have you quit your company. Keep with them—you may thus be able to give the greatest help in the hour of need. Keep with the rascals, and keep well with them."

"I will, Captain! and it will go hard but an Irishman, and old soldier to boot, will not be more than a match for the lot."

"Good-night, then," returned Monteiro, wrapping himself in his cloak.

"I will not venture to leave with you," said D'Arcy, "for though I am not on duty to-night, Morley might see me, and I don't want to let him know that I have the private *entrée*, as they say at Versailles!"

"And look here, my son," cried Robilliard impulsively. "Forgive me, Excellency, but I have been looking back to the old times when you were a daring mischievous youngster, the plague of the whole ship's company.

If you can but give me three or four hours' notice I will find a couple of trusty desperadoes, who will do my bidding and ask no questions."

"They might be very useful—see to them, brave old boy! We will beat John Langley yet, though he is backed up by the Admiralty." Returning the salutes of his companions, Monteiro hastily left the house.

The effect of Lord Chedworth's entertainment upon Maud Langley was exactly the reverse of what might have been expected with an ordinary girl, or even on a girl of somewhat exceptional nature under ordinary circumstances. But neither Maud Langley's nature nor circumstances could be thus classed. Oppressed with a sense of her isolation and helplessness, she felt compelled to look below the glittering surface that surrounded her, and involuntarily recognised its delusiveness. No one seemed to her real or earnest, save her aunt and the puzzling Spanish gentleman, who, in some mysterious covert way, appeared to identify himself with her.

The reality of the former was far from plea-

sant or reassuring ; the earnestness of the latter, if not disagreeable, was startling and oppressive. She felt that a continuance of the life she led would kill her. The outward monotony, the undercurrent of exciting expectation, seemed more than she could bear after the life of tranquillity and innocent occupation to which she had been accustomed. The very quietness and absence of John Langley alarmed her. Maud was a woman of tender nature, but streaked with a delicate pride, and strengthened by a certain high-strung energy capable of grand efforts, which, however, might greatly exhaust the fine exquisitely harmonious machinery that produced them.

The day after the party at Lord Chedworth's she had been so pale and listless that Dorothy was frightened. "Sure, my darling," she said, after their mid-day meal had been served (for the Countess had gone forth, early as was the season, with the restlessness peculiar then as now to the "fine lady," with a distinguished idle party to dine and frolic at Belsize House), "sure it's little good these grand tay-drinkings do ye if you look so

ghost-like ! Tell me, pulse of my heart, what ails ye ?”

“ Indeed nothing I can tell, dear Dorothy, but the terrible need of rest and safety. I thought I should find all with my aunt—but no ! it does not feel safe even here. But she is a true gentlewoman, Dorothy. It seems to me that just a trifle more of, I know not what, and I could love her well. I would she loved me ! as it is, I must give all my love to *you*, dear Dorothy.”

“ Ay, do ! my darlin’ !” returned Dorothy, with droll cynicism. “ I’ll keep it all safe till ye want to take some away—and that you will be sure to do—only leave me a thrifle, alannah ! You were mighty late last night—lie down a bit and try to sleep.”

“ Oh ! I could not sleep, Dorothy, though I was so weary of everything at Lord Chedworth’s, which was wrong—nay, wicked—of me, for all were courteous and kind.”

“ Ah ! small blame to them ! Why should they not show every attention to the Baroness Langdale—and an elegant young lady besides ?”

“ My good nurse ! few think of me save as

the dependent niece of the noble Countess of Helmsford."

"Well, well ! this world's for the wicked."

"Still I should like a little share in it," said Maud, smiling ; "and, Dorothy, I *will* take your advice and lie down awhile."

"Yes, do, my darlin' ! but I mustn't forget to tell you we had an elegant dish of tay with Mistress Sparrow last night, and who should come in but a gentleman for Master Chifferil—his man of business, no less, what buys him bits of paper to cheat the world with. Well, he was mighty tall and straight, and I thought I knew the turn of him, so I looked hard, and, oh, me darling ! all the memories that came drifting over me like a flood ! It was a man that saved me and me sweet sister from death or worse, near thirty years ago, at the siege of Limerick ! a boy that we used to play with by the Shannon—ah, years and years ago !"

"How strange, Dorothy !" cried Maud, drawing her tenderly to her, for she saw the tears in her nurse's keen grey eyes ; "and did he know you ?"

"Ay, that he did !" cried Dorothy, "and I

managed to have a talk with him, and it is my belief he was somehow sent to spy after you, for, ses he, ‘Dorothy, your lady has a strong and watchful friend!’ ”

“Ah, heavens!” cried Maud, clutching Dorothy’s hand, “do you think, is it possible, he was sent by that gentleman?”

“What! the Langdale man? Troth no, I am sure he wasn’t; but he is a brave fellow, and ready to do you a service. Moreover I know where to find him—so take heart, my darlin’.”

“I will, Dorothy—I will e’en say my prayers and try to sleep.”

So the faithful nurse left her, and Maud lay back in a luxurious chair, still and silent, but not asleep. No; her thoughts were active. What if this man were an emissary of her bridegroom? what if he—unseen, unknown—watched over her? What more charming subject for a girl’s day-dream? Some one kind and fair and frank, something like herself, only bolder; something like her dear father, only younger—with whom all would be clear and open, no more fear or mystery, but candour and affection, and, if it

came, even poverty — though poverty was scarce known or recognised then by a demoiselle of high degree. It meant a carriage, but less than six footmen ; a fashionable dress, but, perhaps, no diamonds ; one woman attendant instead of three or four—but loss of station, of the observance due to birth, *that* was impossible, when the *canaille* were as inferior as the coloured races to a free American.

Even with this tender curiosity as to whom and what her unknown husband could be, came the recollection of Monteiro's entreating tones when he asked how he was so unfortunate as to offend her. Why did he care for her favour when Lady Helmsford evidently looked upon him as her own property ? and Lady Helmsford was not so much older than him really. Of course Maud knew her age ; she was thirty-nine or forty, and looked six or seven years younger—not more than eight or nine years older than Monteiro—and she was beautiful and charming ; why should Don Juan *not* love her ? Yet Maud felt he did not. Here reflection became confused, and welcome refreshing sleep stole over the

young orphan, who woke with a resolution to implore her aunt that she might remain *perdu* for some time to come, till something more definite had evolved itself from the painful chaos by which she was enveloped.

The Countess of Helmsford, meantime, had seldom had a more uncomfortable day, albeit the weather had apparently suited itself to the whims of the aristocratic pleasure-seekers.

The party had been talked of the evening before, and Monteiro had been invited to join. He had made some ambiguous answer and never appeared, so the dinner and the music, the "strange birds" and romantic walks, the freedom and unconventionality which were among the chief charms of that doubtful delightful place, Belsize House, were thrown away on her ladyship, as were also the pains taken by the proprietors to provide "twelve stout fellows, fully armed, to patrol between Belsize and London, to ensure the safety of visitors," as stated at the foot of their advertisement.

Maud and Dorothy had long retired to rest when Lady Helmsford returned from the Duchess of B——'s rout. The experienced

Beville knew by the way her ladyship threw aside her fan and held out her arm to have her bracelets unfastened, that she was in one of her "moods," as the household expressed it.

"Will your ladyship take aught before you retire to rest?" asked the cautious Beville, who was not seldom honoured with a sort of contemptuous confidence, and who hitherto, in the absence of any strong temptation to be otherwise, had been secret and discreet, the Countess being well liked, as well as profoundly feared by her servants.

"No! Beville. I have had enough to digest to-day."

Beville only said, "Indeed, my lady;" and Lady Helmsford, permitting her to remove her sacque and hair ornaments in perfect silence, sat down before the dressing-table, and, leaning her elbows on it, covered her face with her hands.

"I do not think you are a gossip, Beville," she said at last, "and I *do* think you have more brains than any other of my household."

"I am sure your ladyship does me honour," said Beville, dropping a curtsey.

“Show your wit by holding your tongue,” resumed the Countess. “I *must* speak of some matters, respecting which I have none to consult. Have you seen Don Juan di Monteiro since he came to town?”

“I have, my lady.”

“And what did he say to you? Speak—and speak truly!”

The Countess turned quickly as she said this, and looked full into Beville’s face with such eager—almost fierce—eyes, that Beville thought they must read her inmost mind.

“The first time I saw him, my lady, was in your dressing-room one morning when you received at your levée; then he gave me good-day very pleasantly. The next time I was crossing the hall as he was going out, and he stopped me and asked me if I remembered him in Paris, and said as how my beautiful mistress was as charming as ever, and gave me a gold piece ‘for old acquaintance’ sake,” he said.

“And was this all?” cried Lady Helmsford.
“No more?”

“No more—I never saw him since.”

“‘For old acquaintance’ sake,” he said,”

repeated the Countess slowly, remaining in the same position as when she had turned to look at her woman — resting her head on one hand, which was half lost among the luxuriant black hair Beville had just released from its trappings, while the open sleeve of her dressing-gown fell back from a finely-moulded, round, firm, white arm, that could embrace passionately or strike ruthlessly. “For old acquaintance’ sake, Beville! That looked as if he needed no new service. What do you think?”

“That it was not a bad lead, my lady, whether he did or did not,” replied the shrewd Beville, watching her lady’s countenance from under her half-shut eyes.

“True, Beville, true!” The Countess’s tone was more hopeful as she uttered this, and a long pause ensued; Lady Helmsford and her attendant preserved the same attitude. “The gentleman is much changed since I saw him in Paris. Do you remember him there, Beville?”

“I do well, my lady! The gayest, the most dashing and open-handed of all the cavaliers that used to frequent your hotel

during those autumn months. Why, your ladyship used to say—but, pardon me, perhaps I ought not to remember—” and Beville, feeling her way, paused.

“Speak — speak without reserve,” cried Lady Helmsford.

“Your ladyship used to laugh and say that of all the sparks you had ever met, Don Monteiro was the hardest to keep at a distance, that he had the fire of youth and the audacity of middle age.”

“True, Beville! The daring of maturity without the coarseness that too often accompanies it. Well, I have no such complaints to make now. Our murky climate appears to exercise a most refrigerating effect upon the Don. I can in no way account for the change. If he were evidently taken up with any other woman I could understand it, but he is not. That handsome creature, Lady Sarah Bellamy, and even Mistress Carthew, bestow unbounded encouragement on him ; still his largest share of attention is for myself. But the difference between what it *was* and what it *is*, I alone can recognise. No ! I have no rival in my own sphere. Is it possible that Monteiro can

be led away by the charm of some obscure female? Impossible! He is in his way fastidious." The Countess rose and walked slowly to the fireplace. "Ah! how I loathe the common humanity that makes such an insult possible!" she exclaimed, with indescribable haughtiness. "To think that a man who might win *my* favour, could ever deign to look at one beneath me!"

"'Tis indeed amazing!" ejaculated Beville, with becoming humility, while in the inner consciousness of the common humanity which her mistress loathed, she could not resist the sneer suggested by certain recollections.

"However, we women of rank have no need to know or regard these aberrations of diseased fancy," resumed Lady Helmsford. "One thing I have observed, there is a stern thoughtfulness about Monteiro he used not to have. It ages him and becomes him well."

"Perhaps the young gentleman hath lost heavily at play," suggested Beville.

"He is not so young," said Lady Helmsford tartly. "But what you say is possible. He supped last week with the Duke of Wharton, and the gambling there is fearful!

Yes, he may have lost heavily ; but then he was changed from the first hour I beheld him in this accursed town. But for this, Beville, I should have listened to the vague unreasonable doubts which have sometimes darted through my heart, that he is attracted to my niece, Maud, that there is some undefinable sympathy between them. But no ! He was changed and cold before he ever saw her. 'Twould be strange," continued the Countess, as if speaking to herself, " strange indeed if I were robbed alike by mother and daughter."

Not understanding to what her lady alluded, Mistress Beville prudently kept silence.

"Be the reason what it may, Beville," Lady Helmsford went on, sinking as she spoke into a low chair before the fire, " I have no power, no hold over Monteiro. Though he continues to seek me, he has with marvellous adroitness slid from the gay audacious lover into an easy complimentary friend. But I will not accept the exchange ; no—I will have all or nothing ! There is something under all this I cannot understand, some favour to be had from the King, some scheme

personal or political which he will not confide to me—and I might be of so much assistance to him.” Again the Countess relapsed into silence and thought, her jewelled fingers interlaced and clasped round one knee, gazing into the depths of the fire with strained burning eyes.

“That I am sure your ladyship could well be,” said Beville softly, to recall her to spoken thought.

“One speech of Don Juan’s has dwelt in my mind,” said Lady Helmsford, answering to the spur. “He said to Lord Chedworth that he desired nothing more than to become an Englishman and wed some English heiress. Think you, Beville, he covets the position of my husband? a share of my fortune?”

“La! my lady,” almost screamed Beville, “you would never think of that—a foreigner—a—a—the Lord knows who! You that have refused so many noblemen!”

“True, my good Beville! I have always preferred a lover to a husband, ’tis infinitely more agreeable; but—but, Beville—Don Juan is a man of honour; he would be grateful to me, and gratitude counts for much in a nature

like his. Then the disparity of our age is not great; moreover, he looks older than his years, and I younger than mine."

"Oh, as to that, your ladyship doesn't look a day too old for him—I mean he doesn't look a day too young for you. But just think of letting the grip of everything out of your own fingers! and as to gratitude, what man was ever grateful to the woman he marries?"

"I might keep much in my own hands," said the Countess, as if speaking to herself. "'Twould be a splendid means of naturalisation in this country. He is well connected, too, in France and Spain, though I cannot make out his exact lineage. He has a sister married to a noble of Provence; but what care I for lineage or anything?" cried Lady Helmsford, suddenly starting up and stretching out her grand beautiful arms. "I love him as I never loved but once before! He has restored my youth, and youth's possibilities of joy. Death and destruction to whatever or whoever stands between us!" and Lady Helmsford, disregarding in her fierce momentary passion the humble confidante who listened in great surprise and some terror to

this outburst, rushed back to the toilette-table, and bending the glass till it reflected her face closely, she gazed into it for a few moments. "I am still handsome," she murmured, "handsomer than many a younger woman, and I must be more fitted for companionship than an unfledged birdling, all smiles and blushes and uncertain moods; yet—yet—what terrible attraction there is in youth!—the one rivalry that might undo me. But I will not think of it. If he is in debt I will set him free! If he wants position I will be his wife! I will bind him to me by the close ties of benefit and gratitude, and, come what may, I'll never loose my hold."

"Ay, my lady—when you have got it," said Beville, roused by the sight of her mistress's passion into sincerity.

"What do you mean?" cried Lady Helmsford, turning wrathfully upon her; "speak, woman!"

"Why, your ladyship said a few minutes back that you had no power—no hold—over this gentleman now."


"I will gain it, Beville, I will win it! Am I a woman to be despised?"

“La ! my lady ! you are ever so much too good for the best man among them. But suppose this young gentleman—gentleman I mean—has, out of perversity, gone and pledged himself to some other lady. There were good two months he was out of sight—”

“God help her, Beville !” said the Countess in a low concentrated voice ; “God help her !”



CHAPTER III.

“Y lady would be glad of Mistress Langley's company at breakfast," was the message brought next day to Maud, some time after Dorothy and herself had despatched their morning meal.

Maud had set forth her music. She enjoyed playing over the sonatas and airs of Paesello and Cherubini. Nothing stood her in such good stead as music. It carried her away from the present and made her forget to look forward with dread. She rose, however, very willingly, and followed Mistress Beville to her aunt's dressing-room.

Lady Helmsford was quite in deshabille.

She looked pale and worn without her rouge, yet something unusual of softness or sadness in her expression, made her seem charming in Maud's eyes.

"Come here, child," she said, holding out her hand with a smile. "I have not seen you since Lord Chedworth's party. My time, you see, is little at my own disposal. However, I have many things to speak of to you—sit down and share my breakfast."

"I thank you, madam; I have already eaten mine."

"Another cup of chocolate will do you good. Set it there, Beville, and leave us. What do you do, Maud, these long, long days when you are alone? Do you mope?"

"I have sad thoughts sometimes, dear madam—then I read, and you have kindly placed a harpsichord in my room—music is a great relief—then there is my needle."

"Does this satisfy you, Maud? have you no ambition?"

"I scarce know," returned Maud thoughtfully. "I think I have had dreams long ago that might have been 'ambition,' but it was more for my father than myself; now I only

pray to be delivered from the doubt and dread of the present."

"What is your idea of life?" cried the Countess, looking keenly at her.

"After one's duty to God, giving and receiving pleasure," exclaimed Maud promptly; "a freer life than this; open air, and friends and fearlessness! Indeed, dear aunt, if you would but send me back to—"

"Tush!" interrupted the Countess impatiently, "*that* is impossible. But you are a strange girl! *how* unlike me—nevertheless I cannot help liking you: could you love me, fair niece?"

"Ah! in truth I could," cried Maud warmly; "but you must give me *your* love, then I will open my heart to you."

"A magnificent bribe," quoth the Countess, not unkindly. "But I have a right to your confidence."

Maud blushed. "No doubt you have, nor would I do anything without your knowledge and approval; but, madam, obedience and honesty are a long way from opening out one's heart."

"Well, let me see if I can unlock it," re-

turned the Countess gently. "Is it not strange," she resumed after a moment's pause, "that your guardian leaves you here unmolested, even though his son does not receive the warmest welcome from either of us? Trust me, he is brewing mischief—only he must go cunningly to work. However, if he is daring and unscrupulous, even *I* cannot protect you."

"Nay, but he will not venture to touch me while I am with you?"

"I am not so sure of that! Nevertheless, there is a certain way of escape for you, child. I have this morning received from Lord Chedworth a formal offer of his hand in marriage."

"Is it possible?" cried Maud, much amused.

"You smile; but accept his lordship and your fears and difficulties are at an end. He is wealthy, powerful, and will be devoted to you; as Viscountess Chedworth you may laugh at John Langley and cast your doubtful heritage to the winds."

"But, my aunt, what am I to do with my first husband?" asked Maud, still smiling.

"Pooh! we shall soon dispose of him—see

my lawyer to-day, join me in giving him instructions, and that obstacle will soon be swept away ; I speak for your own happiness and good, child ; 'tis the only way I see for you to avoid all difficulties and quit you of Harold Langley. Sure you would prefer my Lord Chedworth to that low-bred fop ?”

“ Infinitely, madam, were my choice limited to them, but——”

“ How ?” cried Lady Helmsford ; “ are you so bewitched by a dream—an unsubstantial vision—as to reject a sober advantageous reality ? Come, Maud, open your heart to me in this matter, I will be patient and indulgent with you ; alas ! we foolish women ought to bear with one another’s follies. Speak ! say what you really want and wish respecting this unlucky marriage.”

“ Only that you should have patience, dear aunt, and let me wait that gentleman’s coming. I know—I feel he will appear, and if he is good and wise, why should I not give him the chance if he likes to claim me.?”

“ The truth is you have given the reins to your imagination and fancy yourself in love with this phantom ; speak to me honestly, dear

niece !” Lady Helmsford’s tone was unusually kind, she felt a curious dim, yet anxious longing to be convinced that Maud *had* indulged a girl’s romantic natural dream ; it would be a security against the possible rivalship, a dread of which at times would glance through her brain in spite of reason and her own rejection of it. “ Speak to me,” she repeated, holding out her hand, which Maud gratefully kissed, and retaining a moment or two, drew nearer and seated herself by her aunt’s side.

“ I could tell you everything when you speak to me thus !” she exclaimed, “ and I will try to put what I feel into words, though I can scarce give it clear expression. I think, oh ! so much of that gentleman ! you must own, dear madam, I owe him a great debt ; but for him I would be now these three months Harold Langley’s wife—if, indeed, I still lived—and life is strong in one as young as I am. Thanks to him I am free ! and I do confess that I earnestly hope he will prove a true gentleman—honest, kindly, noble, such as I could fondly love, and so, in some measure, repay him the service he has done me ! but at the first sight of him I may be disenchanted,

and only wish to be delivered from my chains ; and he—I have no right to suppose he means anything save kindly help and protection ; the only words he ever spoke to me promised release, that is all I can tell—all I can find in my heart ; I do not love him, but I wish to do so. In truth, I shall be grieved if I cannot.”

“He must prove a monster of stupidity and unattractiveness if, when so fair a breach is already made in the citadel of your heart, he does not enter in and dwell there,” said Lady Helmsford meditatively. “Tell me, what is your own theory about this man and your marriage, for you have one, of course?”

“I have thought of so many things, but my prevailing idea is, that this gentleman was some friend and comrade of my dear father, who, hearing him often speak of me, felt interested in my forlorn state, and knowing of the plot against me — perhaps knowing more of Captain Langley’s unfitness than we do, he, not being able to take open action, devised this method of defeating my uncle’s plans.”

“’Tis not so improbable an explanation of

the mystery," returned the Countess. "But if this man were a comrade of your father's, Maud, he would be somewhat ancient for a lover?"

"Scarce so old as my Lord Chedworth," said Maud demurely.

"True," replied Lady Helmsford, laughing; "but I proposed *him* as a husband—not a lover; 'tis a different thing."

"Oh! dear aunt, I earnestly hope to find them the same."

"The ways of the world will not change for you, child; what then shall I say to Lord Chedworth?"

"Tell him, with all kindness and courtesy, that I thank him heartily, but do not feel I ought to accept more than I can give; that is, if you will not tell him simply that I am wed, and will take no step towards loosening the bonds until I know more."

"And this is indeed your determination!" said Lady Helmsford, much struck by her niece's resolute tone; "well, I shall write something such as you wish, leave it to me;" and her ladyship made up her mind so to pen the rejection of the elderly suitor as to leave

him a bait of hope and keep him in reserve if it was necessary to resign all hopes of Langdale and break with the Langleys ; “ for,” thought the foreseeing dame, “ it would never do to have this dainty demoiselle my inmate should I wed Monteiro.”

The silence preserved by the Countess while she thus reflected was unbroken by Maud, who fondly hoped that kindly and wise considerations for her own welfare occupied her aunt’s thoughts, but it was interrupted by the entrance of Gomez, who, with one or two curious duckings of the head—intended for bows—advanced and presented a billet to the Countess, who took it with a gracious smile, and, glancing at the direction, selected with her own fair hand a large lump from the sugar-basin, and handed it to the little fellow, who proceeded with an air of much enjoyment to crunch it audibly, while the Countess opened the note and read as follows, her smile fading away as she did so :

“ DEAR AND HONOURED LADY,

“ I thank you heartily for giving me the chance of being your companion in a visit

to the theatre on Friday as I could not go to-night, but, unfortunate that I am, I have also an appointment of importance for that evening which I must not forego. In truth, pleasure and myself have parted company since the bright days we knew in Paris, and I am scarce worth the notice of so lovely a dame, till, having accomplished a grave undertaking of which I hope later to give you an account, I am more like my former self, and a little more worthy to be,

“Your ever devoted friend,

“JUAN DI MONTEIRO.”

Lady Helmsford read this enigmatical epistle through twice before she raised her eyes. When she did she beheld Gomez contemplating her with the sort of delighted grin that anger, or vexation in others, generally drew from him. To start from her seat and administer a thundering box on the ear which sent Gomez howling out of the room, was the work of a second, and then, regardless of Maud, who had risen from her seat, her cheek crimson with shame at an exhibition so widely different from the sober, dignified self-control

she had been trained to consider the characteristic of a gentlewoman, the Countess stood still, her hand yet clutching the paper but dropped by her side, and her eyes wide open with the strained look that shows the present surroundings are unseen in the far-off vision of distant things.

Maud, greatly embarrassed, kept silence, and after a few unpleasant moments, the Countess, with a slight shivering sigh, recalled herself, and turning from her niece to the fire, exclaimed :

“I have letters to write—much—much to do ! so leave me, child, and—give me your company at dinner to-day, we shall probably be alone—go—I will write to my Lord Chedworth, and—but leave me now.”

Maud, curtsying gracefully to her aunt's back and sweeping robe, slowly withdrew—full of sympathy, which she did not dare to express, for whatever grief or annoyance the unlucky note had cost her variable protectress.

“Dear Dorothy,” she cried as she reached the haven of their secluded sitting-room, “I have had a most happy interview ! I have

never known my aunt so kind ! trust me she has a good heart, 'tis her temper that is a trifle uncertain, and none can tell what secret sources of trial she may have."

"True—true for ye, honey ! Anyhow she has had one of the sorest trials all her life long—and that is her own way in everything."

"Yes ! I suppose it is a sore temptation to our unruly wills and affections," returned Maud, smiling ; "at least it is a temptation I am spared, for I have not my own way in anything."

"Not yet, astore ! but we don't know what's coming."

That whole day Lady Helmsford passed in her own chamber. She was indisposed—she had caught cold in her expedition to Belsize House—she doubted if she could join the Princess's card-table that evening. Long and deeply did she ponder upon Monteiro's oft-conned note. Not more resolutely and ingeniously does the vine-root twine itself through interstices and round obstacles to reach the water which is its life, than does

self-love send forth its feelers to reach the balm of flattering explanation for what has wounded it. Thus the Countess concentrated her notice on the passage in which Monteiro declared himself pre-occupied by a grave undertaking, to learn what this was, and associate herself with it, to prove her own power and ability, her capacity for giving help, as well as for bestowing pleasure ; this was her determination. She would change her tactics—she would become dignified and retiring—she would efface the impression that she had intended a *tête-à-tête* dinner and visit to the theatre with Monteiro (and he would have been dull of comprehension if he had not received that impression), by arranging a quiet family party to the play the same night—of which Monteiro would no doubt hear. She must gather up the threads of her life, and so arrange a breathing-space, in which to weave her meshes round the slippery Spaniard.

“I cannot quarrel with John Langley yet,” she thought ; “and I have been somewhat negligent of the son. I will ask him to dine with Maud and myself to-day ; ’tis an honour

that might well make him forget a hundred omissions."

So it came about that Maud's dinner with her aunt, to which she had looked forward as the cementing of their new friendship, was a terrible disappointment ; though the Countess, having decided on her line, braced herself up to perform her part so well, that her agreeable conversation, suave yet dignified manner, and judicious unseen help, made Harold less odious to Maud than he had ever seemed before, and sent that young officer away in high good humour with himself, and determined to prove his own spirit and gallantry by carrying out to the letter his father's crafty plot.

"I had it on my tongue, Maud," said Lady Helmsford, as the door closed on him, "to invite your *fiancée* to accompany us to the play ; but I think we have sacrificed enough to expediency. Have you ever seen a play, child ?"

"Never, dear madam ! never !" cried Maud, her eyes sparkling ; "but I do greatly long to see one. Are you going to be so very good as to take me ?"

“I am,” said Lady Helmsford, smiling; “to-morrow night you shall see both Wilkes and the charming Mrs. Booth at Drury Lane. I will take Sparrow, too; let us do the domestic for once. It will be a rest for me, and if we require beaux to escort us to our carriage, we will find enough and to spare.”

“It will be delightful, dear aunt. One grace more—let me rest quiet and hidden in your house—take me to no more routs or entertainments while my fortunes are so uncertain—they oppress me!”

“Well, Maud, I shall try to meet your wishes, and now I think I must dress and attend her Royal Highness’s card-party, so good-night, child; sleep well, and do not dream of the mysterious stranger!”

Maud laughed, blushed, and was gone.

“Tell me,” said Lady Helmsford to the new footman who answered the bell, “who has called to-day?”

“My Lord Chedworth, Sir Eustace Blount, the Duchess of B——, Lady Sarah Bellamy and a foreign gentleman, Mrs. Farrers, the Marchioness of——”

“Enough! Who was the foreign gentleman?”

“Don Something, my lady; I’m somewhat bad at foreign names, but he called twice, and was much concerned to hear you were indisposed!”

“Let the carriage be brought round,” returned the Countess, as if she did not heed, and she slowly walked away towards her dressing-room, pleased with herself for her resolution in excluding Monteiro. “’Tis the only plan,” she thought; “let him begin to doubt his power over me, and he will strive to rivet it again. I will give him no chance of joining us to-morrow night, and it would be wiser perhaps to yield to Maud’s wishes, and let her seclude herself till her shadowy bridegroom comes to claim her!”

Maud was far too young and light-hearted by nature not to forget her griefs and anxieties, at least for a while, in delighted anticipation of witnessing a play.

“I do wish you might come, Dorothy! but you shall go some day—I think matters will turn out better than we expect: I feel more

light-hearted than ordinary. Well, I will notice everything and try and make a picture for you when I return; and Dorothy, the Countess says I must wear my Indian muslin, and see! she has presented me with this beautiful diamond clasp for my throat—is it not sparkling? sew it safely on the velvet, Dorothy, for this must be my crown jewel.”

“It’s a mighty pretty thing! and I am sure my lady is growing ever so fond of you; sure I always said she would.”

“Did you, Dorothy? I don’t remember.”

The expected hour of delight came at last. Again Maud dined with the Countess, sharing that honour with Mistress Sparrow, who wore the costume prescribed by her mistress, and looked to unusual advantage in grey and black.

Lady Helmsford, though somewhat silent and *distract*, was nevertheless placid and gracious; she had directed the intelligent Beville to be in the way when visitors called, and (if he was amongst them) to encounter Don Juan accidentally. This she had accomplished, and described him as most solicitous respecting her ladyship’s health,

and also anxious to know if she was to remain at home that evening. Beville declared she could not positively say, but she imagined her lady would not go out. "Now," thought the Countess, "if in spite of his important appointment he contrives to call in the hope of finding me alone, it will be a proof he has not quite shaken off old feelings." But Mistress Beville, for some reason of her own, perhaps a reluctance to disturb the peacefulness which seemed so unexpectedly to have revisited her lady, suppressed the fact that Monteiro had carefully inquired if Mistress Langley was to accompany the Countess should she go out. This Beville assured him she would not, as she had heard her mistress say it was that young lady's intention to remain at home, and not appear in public for the future.

In due course the carriage was announced as ready, and, wrapping themselves in their warm cardinal cloaks, the three ladies took their places in the carriage and set forth, escorted by four or five footmen with torches besides the coachmen and those swinging on the footboard, for the journey from St. James's Square to Drury Lane was no small

undertaking. The dangers of the deserted and rutty Strand were wisely avoided by her ladyship's coachman, who directed his horses through Pall Mall, the Haymarket, Leicester Fields, and Long Acre, to the attractive theatre.

The aspect of the house was very new and exciting to the young novice, who now beheld such a scene for the first time. The pit crowded by men, the critics and more finely dressed gentlemen having pushed to the front near the musicians, the gaily attired ladies embellished by the brilliant light of innumerable wax candles. Before the Countess could point out half that was worth notice the curtain drew up, and thenceforward Maud had eyes only for the stage. She wept at the pathos, and laughed merrily at the drolleries. Between the first and second acts a distinguished party entered the stage-box.

"Look, Maud," said the Countess, touching her with her fan, "there is the Princess of Wales—that tall stately lady just sitting down; and that bright saucy-looking girl with reddish hair in the green sacque, with an amethyst comb, is Mistress Mary Bellenden, one of the maids of honour; she is much ad-

mired. See! she turns her head, smiling, to speak to a dark-looking gentleman; he is Lord Lumley. I must take you to Leicester House one of these days when the mystery that at present enwraps you is a little cleared."

Maud looked, and admired, and wondered. The house was handsome and well-proportioned. It was the edifice designed and built by Sir Christopher Wren after the first theatre was burned, and considered the finest in London. The complete change in the current of Maud's thoughts, created by the interest and novelty of all around her, produced the best effect. She forgot the gloom and helplessness of her position, and saw only the bright surroundings of the society amid which her birth gave her the right to mingle. Thus for the moment she felt that the mists of to-day *must* melt and vanish before the warmth and brilliancy which environed without absolutely touching her.

Many noblemen and gentlemen came to pay their respects to Lady Helmsford; but, whether from respect to her niece's wish for obscurity or any other motive, the Countess did not present them to Maud who amused

herself, when not absorbed in the performance, by secretly comparing them with the ideal she had formed of her husband, and earnestly hoped he would resemble *none*. She felt a little surprise, too, that Monteiro did not make his appearance. She had never before accompanied her aunt into society without meeting him. However, Lady Helmsford's ease of manner and tranquillity showed that she expected no visitor to her box beyond the ordinary fine gentlemen who presented themselves.

Between the second and third acts the dark man whom Lady Helmsford had pointed out to Maud as Lord Lumley came to join them, and with ceremonious politeness requested the Countess, on the part of the Princess, to pay her a visit in her box, and return with her to sup. Of course such an invitation was a command; and Lady Helmsford rose at once to comply. "Stay here till the end of the performance," she said to Mistress Sparrow; "the servants shall let you know when the carriage is waiting. As soon as you are safe at home let it return to Leicester House for me." She smiled kindly to Maud,

who again settled herself for unbroken enjoyment of the coming scenes ; so absorbed was she that she started, and at first could scarcely understand, when Mistress Sparrow touched her arm, and said that Lady Helmsford had sent for her, she supposed to give some additional directions, and that she would return immediately. Maud, half turning, saw one of her aunt's servants standing in the doorway, and concluding he had brought the message, she returned to her contemplation of the stage, observing that Lady Helmsford, whom she had noticed speaking to the Princess when she had at first joined the royal party, had retired to the back of the box, out of sight.

It might have been five minutes, or quarter of an hour, or longer, for she did not think of time when wrapped in the sorrows of the fascinating "first lady," after Mistress Sparrow had been called away, when the same footman again presented himself: "Mistress Sparrow begs you will not be uneasy, madam, but my lady, the Countess, is somewhat indisposed, and about to return home. She begs you will join her immediately."

Maud, much alarmed, and knowing enough

of courtly manners to conjecture how serious indisposition must be when it dared to disturb royal arrangements, quickly wrapped her cloak round her, and followed the man, who walked rapidly through passages comparatively deserted, to the staircase and the doorway, where the link-boys and some of the lower sort of theatrical officials were shouting, "My Lady Helmsford's carriage stops the way." Through the entrance Maud could see the open door and steps of a coach. "My lady and Mistress Sparrow are already entered, and awaiting you," said the footman. Maud, anxious about her aunt, and somewhat abashed by the numerous eyes fixed upon her, went hastily forward, and sprang up the steps into the vehicle.

The instant she had done so the steps were huddled up, the door slammed-to with much vehemence, and the coach started off rapidly, with fearful joltings and swayings to and fro. But, almost before the door closed, Maud knew she was entrapped. No Countess, no Mistress Sparrow, answered to her eager terrified cry. She felt round her—she was alone. The rough covering of the seat, the inde-

scribable musty atmosphere of the conveyance, so different from the perfumed luxury of her aunt's—all these indications paralysed her with fear. She strove to let down the windows; they were fastened, and outside was the blackness of a very dark night. She thought she could distinguish the figure of a man on horseback beside the right-hand window: she screamed as loudly as she could, but her cry was probably unheard—certainly unheeded. Still they sped on with desperate headlong haste, which Maud thought must certainly overturn the crazy vehicle. She clasped her hands tightly together, and breathed a fervent prayer; then with wonderful force and courage strove to collect her thoughts and marshal her resources, that she should be sufficiently cool to take whatever chance of escape might offer, or at least not disgrace herself by acting as if distraught by abject terror.

Within the theatre all went on tranquilly for nearly an hour after Maud had been drawn away; Lady Helmsford, sitting at the back where she could not view the house, exchanged whispered repartee and compliments with

Lord Lumley and others in attendance on the Princess ; at length one of the gentlemen having leant forward to look at something specially attractive, observed, "Your ladyship's party has already retired."

"Impossible !" exclaimed the Countess, "even if the carriage were announced, my niece, Mistress Langley, is too much fascinated to leave the house while an actor is left on the stage."

"They are gone nevertheless."

Lady Helmsford rose, went forward, and reconnoitred for herself : "May I beg you will be so good as to inquire if my carriage and my people are here, and if Mistress Langley is unwell, or anything occurred ?" she said uneasily. The gentleman to whom she spoke left the box, and soon returned with the startling intelligence that her ladyship's equipage and servants were awaiting her orders, but that the people round the entrance said that her coach had been called quite half-an-hour ago, and that a young lady had gone away in it.

"Then where is Sparrow ?" exclaimed the Countess in dire distress and anger. Despite

of etiquette and its rigidity, Lady Helmsford broke from the royal group, and soon every man of note in the house was around her—messengers of high and low degree, officials of the theatre, every one that could by possibility be of any use was pressed into the service, and sent north, south, east, and west in search of the robbers and their prey.



CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Monteiro called at St. James's Square on the morning of this eventful day, he was surprised and disappointed to find that the Countess had gone out. Having been denied the previous morning, he had counted surely on admittance, and though it was but occasionally that he found Maud with her aunt, still there was the chance of doing so, and he had not seen her for nearly four days — while, through all those long dreary hours, he had been haunted by the delightful reflection of her delicate spiritual beauty — the painful puzzling recollection of her coldness and perceptible change from the frank confidential tone in which she used to speak to him.

“I do not deserve it,” he thought; “some-one has been making mischief—possibly the Countess herself! What a misfortune that I should have known that woman! Yet had I not, how should I have known her sweetest fairest niece? I thought her ladyship’s whim in favour of my unworthy self would have been diverted by some new fancy long ago! What a crowning embarrassment it adds to the rest! Shall I dare to call again late, and try my chance? No, it might convey a wrong impression to the Countess. I must beware of even the semblance of double dealings! Does Maud Langley accuse me of it in her heart? or does she dream that I am her lover? No! she thinks of no lover! She has had enough to frighten her from all thoughts of love. Shall I ever be able to win her—and ought I? Bah! who will love her as well—or care for her so fondly as I do? But I am in the mid-stream of circumstance, I must strike out boldly for shore or I shall be lost!” thus thought Monteiro, as, after his interview with Beville, he was slowly rowed from Westminster stairs to Chelsea, in order to ascertain himself, at Sir Stephen Compton’s

residence, when its owner was expected in England.

Having accomplished this errand he returned to his lodgings and determined to remain indoors and write letters. A nameless expectation and uneasiness rendered him unwilling to be absent from his lodgings, though the assurance he had received that Mistress Langley was to remain safely at home made such sensations, he told himself, unreasonable.

Still time went heavily. About seven o'clock, his valet ushered in a rare visitor, the little negro boy, Gomez.

Gomez laughed and kissed Monteiro's hand and expressed much joy at seeing his former master, and after some minutes spent thus, Monteiro thought of dismissing the little fellow, when it suddenly occurred to him that so unusual an event as a visit from Gomez required explanation.

"Tell me," said Monteiro, "did your lady send you to me, Gomez—have you any letter or message?"

"No—none—only Señor Chifferil had told him to go and see his former master, and be

sure to tell him that the Countess and Mistress Langley had gone forth to the theatre—a theatre not far off—something Lane.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Monteiro, “I will go there at once—Chifferil fears something—I will not stop to change my dress.” He was still in his walking attire and boots. “I can hang about the entrance,” he thought, “till I see her safe in Lady Helmsford’s carriage.” So thinking, he summoned Victor, and began to fasten on his sword which he had laid aside. He was giving his valet directions to see that little Gomez had supper before he left, when the man who acted as general factotum of the house knocked at the door, and said there was a rough fellow below like a stable-boy, who insisted on seeing Don Monteiro, as he had a letter to be delivered into his own hand.

“Send him up to the next room!” exclaimed Monteiro, and taking a light from the table went to meet him.

The bearer of the note was indeed a ragged-looking creature—bare-headed and bare-foot.

“The gentleman said as how he should be

rewarded if he gave the note into the hand of him who could tell him the best kind of grain."

"Rye!" exclaimed Monteiro eagerly.

"Right, your honour! here's the billet."

Monteiro saw D'Arcy's strange hieroglyphics on the paper, and hastily snatching it from the rude messenger, bestowed a piece of silver on him and motioned to him to begone. With a caper of delight he obeyed, and Monteiro tearing open the letter read these half-illegible sentences:

"To-night is fixed on at the Theatre Drury Lane, a carriage and four ready with three fellows besides myself (two of them mounted) to guard it, others to join in the Strand, as the route is to lie that way to Chelsea and I know not where. I will stick to them—try and stop us before the others join.

"H. D'A."

Monteiro read—his soul in his eyes—then rushed back to the room he had quitted, and hastily opening a cabinet or press, began to fasten a foreign-looking sash round his waist.

"Victor," he exclaimed, "my pistols! all

of them. Can you fight like the devil? stand by me now, and I'll make it worth your while."

"Ventre St. Gris!" exclaimed the valet, "I am with you, Monsieur; I was a fencing master once."

"Look to the loading of these pistols!" exclaimed his master, "put a belt round you, and stick a brace in; and here, take this sword, it's a strong one—now a mask. Are you ready? Gomez!" A short stern injunction to the boy in Spanish, to go back, and to hold his tongue, and Monteiro, pressing his hat firmly on his head, having thrust a couple of pistols into his belt, and a third into the breast of his coat, rapidly descended the stairs; at the foot of them he met the landlady.

"Eh, sir! what awful errand——"

"There, there, good woman, you shall know within an hour. Look to the fire and the lights; I may bring back company."

The night was pitch dark—a cold blast from the river swept up Salisbury Street where Monteiro's abode was situated. His heart beat high. Although it was not yet late enough for the general audience to be

leaving the theatre, how could he tell but that by some jugglery Maud had been already entrapped, and before he could reach and save her what crime might not have been perpetrated! Turning into the Strand, at that hour dark and deserted, he walked quickly in the direction of Bridge Street as the line most likely to be adopted by the conspirators; and as they went he hastily explained to his companion that an attempt was to be made that evening to carry off the niece of his friend Lady Helmsford, that he was determined to defeat it, and that he would be aided by D'Arcy.

"I fear an overpowering force, so, while D'Arcy and I hold the ruffians in check, you must conduct the lady to my lodgings, Victor, and thence we will convey her home."

He had hardly uttered the words before the sounds of horses and wheels approaching rapidly warned them that the moment of action had come, and they soon descried through the gloom a lumbering coach dragged by four horses, which were urged to their best speed by two men riding postillion; two others were on the box, one horseman on a

grey steed kept alongside the wheelers, and another rode by the carriage door on the side where Monteiro and his attendant were walking, as it was most in shadow. Directly they came abreast, the horseman by the carriage called out something in Spanish, and Monteiro instantly drew the pistol from his breast and fired into the near leader, exclaiming as he did so, "Victor ! mark the grey." Both shots at such close quarters told. The team, suddenly arrested, tumbled together over the dying horse, and with their riders became a confused struggling heap, while the two men on the box with difficulty saved themselves from a bad fall : they rapidly found their feet, and one of them went to extricate the rider of the disabled grey horse. Meantime, Monteiro rushing to the carriage heard a bullet whiz past his ear from some direction, and saw D'Arcy throw himself from his horse, and drawing his sword take his stand by Victor, who was keeping off the two men who had been on the coachbox ; all this passed with lightning-like rapidity. While Monteiro tore open the door and exclaiming, "Trust yourself to me, dear lady ! you shall be safe

with your aunt before an hour is over!" held out his arms to lift the terrified inmate from the carriage.

"Who—who are you? oh, can it be Monsieur di Monteiro?" asked poor Maud in a tremulous whisper.

"Yes; yes! but there is not a moment to lose!"

"Take, oh! take me to the Countess!" exclaimed Maud, throwing her arms round him and clinging tightly, so tightly that, in all her terror, she could feel the strong beating of his heart.

He lifted her to the side of the road, where he still held her while he called "Victor!"

"Can you walk a little way—only a few hundred yards? I dare not stay with you! I must beat these fellows off. The man I have called will take you to a place of safety; once you are escaped they will be gone!"

"I will do as you direct," said Maud with wonderful composure, though trembling violently. Seeing she understood him, Monteiro sprang back into the fray, and

Victor, crossing to where Maud stood, led her quickly to the turn into the dim street where Monteiro lodged.

“Give them a shot,” growled D’Arcy, “and let us retreat. The leader is gone down the Strand. I doubt but he is hurt by his roll over, and is gone to call up the others.”

All this struggle had not been conducted without much outcry and loud oaths.

“Who are you? By what right do you stop respectable travellers?” exclaimed the bigger of the two men now opposed to Monteiro and D’Arcy.

“We are Lady Helmsford’s servants, and acting for her,” shouted Monteiro. “Take care what you do; the lady has escaped. Why fight for an empty casket?”

As they called out thus, D’Arcy and Monteiro had gradually pressed back their antagonists past the street down which Victor had conducted Maud, and hearing a sound of approaching horses D’Arcy called out, “Here are the rest of my lady’s people!” Monteiro at the same time firing another pistol at random, whereupon the smaller swordsman, who had not as yet uttered anything save

strange oaths, cried, "The game's up! I am hit! Save yourself! I am not going to swing for this night's work!"

"By ——!" cried the other, "D'Arcy, you've turned traitor! I knew you would! Take that for payment!"

He aimed a desperate thrust at the Irishman, who was somewhat thrown off his guard by the short parley; but Monteiro, quick as thought, caught and partly turned it aside, receiving, as he did so, a flesh wound in the upper part of his arm, and seeing that both their opponents were beating a rapid retreat, D'Arcy and Monteiro followed their example, and found themselves at the door of the latter's residence just as it had been closed on Maud and her escort.

When the object of all this fray beheld the entrance of a respectable-looking house, and a portly, motherly, well-dressed female standing in the light of a lamp suspended from the roof, she felt she was saved.

"Oh, stay with me!" she exclaimed, breaking from Victor, and taking good Dame Jefferson's hand in both her own, she pressed it to her. "Stay with me, good friend! do not

leave me till I am restored to Lady Helmsford—to my aunt.”

“Dear! dear!” cried the landlady, “what grand young lady is this? This is the company we expected! Well, indeed! My lady, I will gladly do all I can. Dear! dear! your beautiful shoes are all spoiled, and you are scarce able to stand. Come upstairs with me to the Don’s room. There is a good fire, and I will mull you a cup of wine.”

“Take zee best care of this noble demoiselle,” said Victor in his broken English; “I return to zee combat.”

He was hastening forth when he met Monteiro and D’Arcy.

But Mistress Jefferson, intent upon succouring the terrified girl given to her care, had already begun to support her upstairs, for, in truth, Maud’s limbs were hardly equal to the task. A strange numbness seemed to pervade her and dull her faculties; she was too healthy, too much mistress of herself to faint, and she was too deeply agitated to shed tears. She just wanted to be quite still and silent for a few moments, so she clung, quivering in every nerve, to the stout arm of the buxom

landlady, and scarce saw where she was going till she was in the chamber usually occupied by Monteiro as his principal sitting-room. Here Mistress Jefferson bustled about, removing the dainty satin shoes which had been soiled in the transit to the present haven, and placing Maud in a large cushioned chair by the fire, she proceeded to bring wine, which she insisted the young lady should taste. Maud did so, thinking it strong and nasty, nevertheless, feeling wonderfully revived after she had swallowed it.

“Where am I? and who are you that are so good to me?” she asked, looking round wonderingly at the curious mixture of common furniture and costly articles of foreign workmanship.

“In the lodgings of Don Juan di Monteiro, madam, and I have the honour to be his landlady.”

“And will my aunt come soon?”

“Ah! that I know not. In short, I know nothing; but if you’ll allow me, my lady, I will step down and inquire, and find you a dry pair of shoes, and a sacque of my daughter’s, if you will deign to wear them,

for this lovely muslin has been dragged through the mire."

"Oh, do not leave me!" cried Maud, stretching out her hands; "I dare not be alone!"

"Nay, madam, I must; you are quite safe. There's not an honester house in all London than mine." So saying, the landlady bustled away, and did not return for what seemed a terribly long time to Maud, who heard her voice before she entered, speaking loudly as if to some one at a distance. "Dear heart alive! I never did hear of anything half so terrible. Set supper in my own parlour; I'll be down soon. Here, madam," pushing open the door, and appearing flushed and eager, "here are my daughter's best shoes and sacque," kneeling to put on the neat black slippers which yet were scarce a fit for the feet that essayed to wear them. "And dear! dear! you are trembling still, and no wonder! but Mr. Victor is busy mulling a cup of claret. You must take it. And the Don is just having his wounds seen to, and removing the marks of the fray; and he begs then you will permit him to see you, and settle about

taking you to St. James's Square. I'm sure I wonder——”

“How! is Monsieur di Monteiro wounded?” cried Maud; “I am so grieved! Not severely, I do trust? Tell him I long to see and thank him, and to know how it all happened; but above all, to go to Lady Helmsford and dear Dorothy.”

“And so you shall, my lady, all in good time; but Mr. D'Arcy tells me the Strand is swarming with ruffians on the look-out for your ladyship, so you must e'en rest till the coast is clear. There, now, I hope you feel more comfortable, and I'll see if I can't cleanse this beautiful muslin. I was a rare hand at clear-starching once.”

“D'Arcy!” repeated Maud, recalling the name and Dorothy's communications. “Who is D'Arcy?”

“Oh, a very civil-spoken gentleman, a follower of his Excellency Don Monteiro; has fought with him somewhere abroad. It's well he was at hand to help in your ladyship's rescue.” A knock at the door interrupted the flow of her eloquence. “Ah! 'tis Mr. Victor with the mulled wine. It smells

right good. Do, madam, just taste it, and this sugared biscuit, it will revive you."

"Indeed I am wonderfully recovered, and oh! so thankful, kind dame, to be here, but I can scarce swallow anything more. However, I would not be ungracious." She put the cup to her lips. "It is indeed excellent," added Maud, setting down the cup.

"And now may I tell Don Monteiro that you will see him?"

"Yes, certainly."

The landlady put some more coal on the fire, gathered up Maud's shoes and sacque, curtsied, and departed. The few minutes that ensued were very troubled. Maud longed, yet dreaded, to see her deliverer. Here was the culmination of the indefinite sympathy, or comprehension, that always seemed to link them together; moreover, the fact of D'Arcy being his follower seemed to point to some more tangible connection. Nor could she believe that her rescue had been the result of accident. *Who* was this stranger, who thus watched over her?

At this stage of her reflections, Maud rose and contemplated herself in the only mirror

the room could boast ; it was over a sort of console table, on which stood a small richly-inlaid cabinet. The image reflected was of a very pale delicate face, the eyes looking all the darker and larger for the pallor of the cheeks ; masses of nut-brown hair a little loosened and careless, scarce disordered ; and a slight graceful figure looking somewhat strange in a white silk petticoat, and a sacque of gay many-coloured chintz. “How my aunt would laugh, and—” but the sound of the door-handle turning, made her return quickly to her seat by the fire, with a beating heart, as Don Juan di Monteiro entered and came towards her. He had completely effaced the signs of the fray, and wore a suit of violet velvet with cut steel buttons and a rich lace cravatte ; the left sleeve of his coat had been opened and was tied with ribbons, but he did not wear a sling ; something indescribable in his eyes, in his whole bearing, thrilled through Maud with a species of fear as he approached, but she surmounted it, and rushed into words to support her courage.

“How can I thank you enough, Monsieur di Monteiro ? you have saved my life.” She held out her hand.

Monteiro raised it respectfully to his lips.

“Any man would do as much for the humblest woman ! How much more would I not do and dare for you !” he said this in a low voice, his eyes cast down, and with a slight hesitation, very different from the calm assurance of his ordinary manner.

“And may I not return to Lady Helmsford ?”

“Not immediately,” returned Monteiro. “It is scarce safe, but you shall not be delayed beyond what is unavoidable. Tell me,” he went on, the ease and ardour of his voice and bearing returning as he spoke, “have you recovered the terrible shock you must have received ? Your hand still trembles !” he made a motion as if to take it again, but checked himself. “I so earnestly hoped you might have been spared this.”

“Then you know more than I do. Ah ! tell me everything. And your wound ! how heartless of me to forget ; is it very painful ?”

“It is nothing,” returned Monteiro, turning from her, and leaning against the mantelpiece with averted eyes.

“Ah ! Monsieur di Monteiro,” cried Maud,

struck by the peculiar restraint of his manner, "you know something of the mystery that surrounds me; tell me all—it would be kinder, and I am braver than I seem—tell me all, I entreat you." She held out her clasped hands to him imploringly.

Monteiro walked down the room and back. "I will," he exclaimed. "It is a grand opportunity. You shall know all. Turn your eyes, dear lady, to mine," he resumed after a moment's pause, and leaning on the back of her chair; "look well into them, and say, do they recall any event of your life?"

Maud obeyed; too absorbed by curiosity to hesitate, she gazed into the clear bold brown eyes fixed gravely and tenderly upon her. And as she gazed, she recognised why they had always seemed dimly familiar. The scene at Langdale Priory came back to her. Her cheek grew yet more deadly white, her heart seemed to stand still as she felt the moment she had hoped for, yet dreaded, had come; but Monteiro was at her feet.

"You remember!" he exclaimed, drawing the violet and silver rosette from his bosom. "Yes! beautiful beloved! I am your husband."

Maud started from her seat, and drew back overwhelmed with a flood of emotion and remembrance. This man who claimed her, she had seen him at Lady Helmsford's feet; she had been warned against him as a daring libertine. He belonged to the cruel Catholic bloody race of Spain; and, worse than all, there was a strange power in his dark loving eyes, that made her fear even herself. *Who* would deliver her out of his hands?

"Good God!" cried Monteiro, struck by the shrinking terror of her gesture; "you do not fear me? you do not shrink from me?"

He rose as he spoke, and stood looking earnestly at her.

"No!" returned Maud, striving to steady her tones, and preserve a brave front in spite of the mortal terror which crept through her veins. "No! Why should I fear a man of honour who promised when the time came to release me?" and she pressed her hand on her heart, which now beat as though it would have burst from her bosom.

"Ay! I promised then, now I cannot. No! I could not give you up."

"Sir," said Maud in her stateliest manner,

“would it not be more becoming to us both, were we to reserve this discussion for the presence of Lady Helmsford?”

“No, dearest!” cried Monteiro, with a sort of tender familiarity infinitely alarming, but turning away restlessly to pace the room again. “No! that would indeed be throwing up the game!” He paused, and gazing earnestly at her, exclaimed, “Brave daughter of a brave race! how gallantly you strive to hide your fears! but cast them away, sweet wife. In me you have the truest *friend*, if you will have nothing else. Forget that I claimed you. I want you to collect your thoughts, and hear all I have to tell; it is important for your own future.”

The relief of his calm and candid tone was so great, that poor Maud could not sustain the tension by which she had preserved her composure, the sweet soft mouth quivered; large tears, “the first of a thunder-shower,” forced themselves on the long lashes, hung a moment and dropped; then she broke down utterly, and covering her face in her handkerchief she wept vehemently, her slender frame heaving with sobs.

“For God’s sake, Maud,” cried Monteiro, yet not attempting to approach her—“For God’s sake, dry your eyes, if you would leave me the smallest self-control. I did not think you would be thus overcome; here, sit down quietly. I will place myself opposite you, and we will talk over your affairs and prospects as if there was no question of marriage between us.”

He moved the large chair to the table as he spoke, and Maud, struggling for composure and relieved by the tears she had shed, removed the handkerchief from her face, and gave him a grateful smile, which did not help to steady his pulses.

“Thank you,” she said. “I will then readily listen to all you have to say.” She took the seat he had placed for her. And Monteiro, walking to the end of the room, unlocked the cabinet which Maud had already noticed, and took from it some papers; looking through and arranging them in silence for a minute or two, he then took a chair opposite his still trembling guest, and looked at her with a smile partly amused, yet infinitely tender.

"'Tis a strange position," he said. The words and look brought the colour back to Maud's cheek with a quick rush.

"Your explanation?" she asked coldly.

"You shall have it. I make no conditions of secrecy. You are too brave and sensible a woman to need them, and you will see as I proceed, how necessary silence and caution are to us. Yes, *us*, let me for this brief hour speak as if you were my wife."

Maud rested her arm on the elbow of the chair, and her brow on her hand, hiding her eyes; but the pulse which throbbed visibly in her white slender throat, showed how deceptive was her outward quiet.

Monteiro heaved a quick sigh, and went on, "Have you ever heard of an uncle of your father's? a grand-uncle of your own, Rupert Langley?"

"I have," she replied. "He was thought to be dead for long."

"Yes; are you aware that about two years before Lord Langdale's death, letters passed between them?"

"I know my father heard of him, but what I cannot tell!"

“Then, sweet one, know that *I* am his only son; your kinsman if nothing else, Rupert Juan di Monteiro Langley, for *I* also bear the name of my dear mother’s father.”

Maud looked up in great astonishment. “*You* my kinsman! Why! but let me hear to the end.”

In reply Monteiro proceeded to detail rapidly and with much animation, how, after long estrangement from his native land and everything English, his father sent him about two years before to London, with a letter to John Langley, and repeated the narrative we have already heard him relate to Chifferil. After the death of his father, Monteiro returned to the Bahamas where their chief station had been, to make arrangements for quitting a rover’s life—for which his education both in France and Spain had unfitted him. This accomplished, he determined to seek Lord Langdale and warn him of John Langley’s true character.

It was on his voyage to Europe the previous spring that he had been so fortunate as to rescue Sir Stephen Compton and his daughters from death and outrage at the hands of Por-

tuguese pirates. Sir Stephen was profoundly grateful for this deliverance, and also for conveyance to England where Monteiro safely landed them. He volunteered to reconcile the young rover to the authorities, and to do him what service he could. Monteiro then proceeded to Paris, leaving his ship at Havre, but found Lord Langdale dead and Maud removed. Paris, however, was attractive, and he had no distinct plan of life or vengeance. This was the time at which he first became acquainted with Lady Helmsford.

Here Maud turned her face to him and listened with increased attention, a movement not unnoticed by the narrator.

“I had no idea at first of her relationship to you,” continued Monteiro, as he must still be called. “Suddenly I was roused from an idle life of pleasure by a communication from a man who had been my father’s boatswain, and who now keeps a tavern here, informing me that another old comrade of ours, D’Arcy, had scent of the pardon ; that John Langley had *you* in durance at Langdale ; that he was about to wed you to his son ; that, in short, the pardon which I was so desirous of find-

ing, would but aggrandise and enrich that scoundrel! I cannot describe the rage and impatience which filled me. I posted from Paris to the coast as fast as horses could take me, having despatched a trusty messenger to my lieutenant to take my saucy schooner across, and cruise off Langholm Head and thereabouts, waiting my signal. I crossed from Calais in an open boat one desperate rough night, and reached London only to find that D'Arcy had started for France in search of *me*. However, all thought of the pardon was swallowed up in a fierce desire to upset John Langley's plans. I found Harold was yet in town; I contrived to meet him more than once in public places, saw he was of my own height, noticed his long fair hair, his companions and his habits. I decided my plan; I rejoined my ship and frequently visited the village inn at Langdale, ascertained the day fixed for the wedding, disposed of the parson, and finding they had sent for another, played out the card I had in reserve, caught my bird, stripped him of his plumage, and took his place."

Monteiro spoke rapidly till he reached this

climax. Maud, drawn out of her personal fears by the deep interest of his story, had turned fully towards him and listened with eyes as well as ears.

“This is indeed a strange tale,” she said; “but you have more to tell.”

“Hitherto,” he resumed, “I confess I was simply guided by hatred to John Langley, and keen desire to mar his plotting. I did not think of *you*—yet the question of wedding you to me had been mooted between our fathers, as I will prove to you. I counted upon the delay that must occur before the marriage could be set aside—the difficulties that might arise—the chances I should find of getting access to you, but I did not allow sufficiently for the reckless selfishness of those who held you. I hung about Langdale till I knew you had left, and then returned to London.”

Monteiro paused and rose, moving to the fire-place, where he leant against the mantel-piece.

“Such were the motives that induced me to personate your bridegroom,” he resumed in a suppressed tone full of feeling; “but I

did not reckon on a new ingredient which came to dominate the rest, when, after the solemn words we both uttered, you fainted and lay deathlike and helpless in my arms—a deep, intense pity and tenderness for you filled my heart ! I have loved after a fashion before ; but when I looked upon the fragile girl, thus alone, at the mercy of cruel avaricious men, on the pure beauty of the angel face just vowed to me—my own, lying in my grasp—a new feeling sprang to life within me, something of a parent's regard ; but Maud—my own—my wife ! a lover's passion too ! The overpowering desire to carry you away then and there was almost stronger than reason ; but not even the uselessness of the attempt deterred me so much as the fear of injury or injustice to you. And so I left you, darling, that I might win you openly, or rather, win your place for you. But now that I have told you all—that I have thrown aside the mask—I feel I cannot live through the torments of the last few weeks again. I cannot let you go ; do not shrink from me.” Again he knelt at her feet and caught her hand in both his, covering it and her arm with

eager kisses. "Stay with me, Maud," he almost whispered in deep quick accents, his breast heaving with strong emotion; "I am your husband—none can deny my right; stay with me. In truth 'tis best and safest for yourself; trust my great love to teach *you* how to love. I can keep you hidden from all, safe from persecution, from all disturbance for the short interval before the King returns, and your own is restored to you; none will dream that you are with *me*. Who can offer you the devotion I do? you are singularly alone—be mine, beloved! By all I hold most sacred, I will be your brother, till I can win your love."

These words, uttered with passionate rapidity, together with his tightening grasp of her hand, completely upset the small amount of composure which her interest in his story had enabled Maud to collect. Her head felt dizzy—a strange faint feeling not *all* pain or terror, though both preponderated, made her look round in a sort of despairing search for a way to escape. The character of Monteiro as portrayed by Lady Helmsford, stood out in her memory to warn her against

too readily yielding to the conviction of his sincerity which his look and tone almost compelled her to admit.

His vehemence—her position—alone with the stranger who was undeniably her husband—all rushed upon her with a sense of wild overpowering fear, yet still her pride and courage enabled her to preserve the appearance of calmness ; she strove to withdraw her hand, and forced her trembling lips to say : “ In truth, sir, you alarm me.”

But so shaken was her tone that Monteiro released her hand, and then Maud, with another terrified glance round, losing her self-control, wringing her hands, cried aloud :

“ Oh ! Dorothy, dear Dorothy ! Where are you, Dorothy ? ” and, covering her face, drew away to the farthest side of the room.

“ Good God ! do I inspire such horror ? ” exclaimed Monteiro, infinitely mortified at the result of his appeal. “ Dearest lady, forgive me,” he went on in an altered and calmer tone ; “ I am too rough, too fiery for so delicate a darling as you are ! but trust me—I will not again forget myself. Sit down once more—see—your fear has mastered me !

we will speak together quietly and reasonably, and, on my honour, if you decide on returning to Lady Helmsford's protection, I will myself conduct you there; but believe me 'twill only increase our difficulties."

Maud, a little ashamed of her own fears, and much reassured by Monteiro's manner, returned to her seat.

"I fear I am somewhat foolish, pardon me; I am much shaken, and pray—pray take me back to Lady Helmsford! Do you not see it is impossible? I could not—I dare not stay with you, a stranger. I daresay all you have told me is true! but still, how can you care so much for one you scarce know? It seems to me that love must be of slow growth, as a noble character gradually reveals itself, and tenderness blooms upon esteem."

"The fair dream of an unawakened heart," said Monteiro, as he turned and stood still, for he had again sought relief in restless pacing to and fro. "There is another love, sweet one! strong and true, that leaps to instantaneous life, as a glance, a smile, a tone, at once reveals and fills a hitherto dimly felt void, and heart calls to heart, Come! I have

waited for you—let us blend our throbbings into one ! Why do you not respond to me, Maud, my Maud, for you *are* mine !”

“ But—my good cousin—as you say you are, I beseech you fulfil your promise—restore me to my aunt !”

“ Still unmoved,” murmured Monteiro, and bending over the papers he had laid upon the table he selected one. “ You will recognise your father’s writing,” he said, “ read this ; it was received by mine a few weeks before his death, his murder. Forgive me if I detain you—but there are some matters we must decide before we part—if such is your will.” He handed her a letter as he spoke.

“ It is indeed my dear father’s writing,” she exclaimed, and proceeded to read it, recognising with a sorrowful pleasure Lord Langdale’s simple and not very polished style.

After a few lines, expressive of the pleasure it would give him to see his long-lost uncle, and a description of his own broken fortunes, the letter ran thus :

“ I should like to see your son, and doubt not he is a chip of the old block. I thank you for your wish to wed him to my daughter ;

but I fear me his has been too rough a school to fit him for mating with so tender a plant as my Maud ! Yet am I fearful for the child's fate—she will either be penniless and endangered by fearful ill, or wealthy and a prey to designing sharpers—let me then see your boy Rupert, ere we speak more of the alliance."

"Alas !" exclaimed Maud, laying down the paper. "Alas, my father ! I lost all when I lost you ; but," turning with indescribably noble grace to Monteiro, "I do pray you pardon my doubts and fears, I acknowledge you as my kinsman ; I feel you are of my father's blood, and I thank you for the great goodness you have shown me ; nay, more, I will be guided by your counsel, only, dear cousin, do not speak to me again as you did just now ; you make me tremble and my heart stand still. I do not like to be thus shaken."

"Faith !" exclaimed Monteiro, with a frank smile that reassured his guest wonderfully, "you set me a hard task, but I will strive to obey. Well, my counsel is, if you *will* forsake me—keep all I have told a profound secret from Lady Helmsford ; stay as much in

your chamber as you can ; avoid those cursed Langleys. In little more than a fortnight I shall be able to place the pardon, which gives you the 'Heritage of Langdale,' in the hands of the King. I have it here ; how I got it is too long to tell. The shorter the time, the greater the danger. If John Langley had an idea of my object in seeking the King, he would use his right as guardian, remove you beyond aid, and force you to be his son's wife. God of heaven ! my blood turns cold when I think—but," interrupting himself, "you will fancy I say this to frighten you—to make you take refuge with me. I see you doubt me ; nevertheless, trust me so far as to be guided by my advice ; let *nothing* tempt you to reveal our—our marriage to the Countess."

"But——what shall I call you, my cousin?" and Maud looked, smiling at the peculiarity of their position, across the table to where Monteiro had placed himself at a judicious distance.

"Ah ! call me Rupert," he exclaimed, "sweetest cousin and wife ; even so much of familiarity is delicious."

"Hush, hush !" she replied. "Then, Rupert,

is it right that I deceive my aunt, who has been so good to me?"

"I do not see that she has been so wonderfully good! And I tell you, Maud, a small thing would change her. It will be fatal if she knows I am your husband." Monteiro spoke too earnestly to measure his words.

"Cousin," said Maud, looking steadily at him, "have you ever sought her in marriage?"

"Never!" he replied promptly; "never, on my word!" But though he met Maud's eyes frankly at first, the memory of certain passages of the Countess's own unmistakable feeling for himself rose up to embarrass him, and his own eyes sank under Maud's glance.

She sighed. "Well, as it will not be for long I will even obey you," she said; "but it goes against me—and Dorothy?"

"Not a syllable, as you love—— no, not *me*, your own safety. She may be good, but she is imprudent; she let out to D'Arcy the fact of your having received a billet from your strange husband."

"And that was from you! How wonderful! How did you get it conveyed?"

"That I will not tell you now; but I can

always write to you. This marriage of ours, too, I always strove to keep it hidden from unholy eyes. I did not mean to confess it to you now, but your distress—the opportunity overcame me, and—I am punished.”

“I did not mean to wound you; but how could I suddenly, without knowledge, take you for my husband?”

“How was it you consented to wed Harold Langley?”

“In truth I scarce know,” replied Maud frankly and gravely. “I was so miserable at Langdale, I would have done anything to escape. I did not feel then as I do now; I seem to be years older, and—and—I did not care enough for Harold to be disturbed, nor did he care for me——”

“Ay!” cried Monteiro, “you felt that your nobility and loveliness were of no account with him, compared to the rank—the rich heritage—you would bring him!”

“And you, Cousin Rupert? Has that heritage no part in colouring your estimate of me?”

“No, madam,” he returned, much wounded; “nor do I deserve the taunt. There was a

time, I grant, when I should have coveted so fair a portion of my country's land ; since I knew *you* I have forgotten it. I trust you are not incapable of comprehending the unselfishness of a love which enables me to resist the maddening temptation to insist on my right to the companionship of my wife."

"I did not intend to hurt you," said Maud penitently ; "perhaps now that you have told me all——"

"I will at once see that you are restored to your aunt," interrupted Monteiro ; replacing the letter of Lord Langdale in the cabinet, and carefully locking it he left the room.

"You are not angry, Monsieur de Monteiro ?" asked Maud faintly as he went out ; but he did not hear her.

Overcome by a variety of emotions, Maud rested her head upon the table and wept quietly—almost refreshingly. She wished she had not uttered those words of doubt ; she saw that Rupert, or Monteiro was of a different calibre from the other men she had met, but still the thought of his curious intimacy with her aunt rose up to hold her back from

unreserved confidence in him. Time only could solve that and other things.

But Monteiro soon returned. "I have been consulting with D'Arcy," he said. "I fear the Strand is scarce safe for you yet. The best plan will be, I think, to go myself to St. James's Square to let Lady Helmsford know of your safety, and send her carriage and servants and your own Dorothy to fetch you in safety." He paused. "Let me again impress on you the necessity of keeping this conversation secret. Adieu, madam!—Trust me. If you are resolved to misunderstand and reject me, I will not intrude myself upon you; for the present we must meet as strangers."

He bowed low and was gone before Maud could frame a reply.



CHAPTER V.

LADY HELMSFORD had a true tyrant nature of the better sort. Given her own special fancies and desires, she could be generous ; and, though hard and resolute when crossed or disappointed, was capable of warm-hearted impulses which might deceive ordinary judges of character.

She would willingly enough scatter benefits, but in the spirit of casting crumbs to the dogs beneath her table. To recognise the *right* of common humanity to consideration and sympathy, was quite beyond the bounds of her comprehension ; nor could it enter into her heart to conceive a just beneficence,

that elevates rather than oppresses the recipient.

The outrage which had just been committed roused her better feelings. She pictured to herself the terror and helplessness of her niece, with the indignation and longing to rescue her natural to the chivalry inseparable from a brave, bold disposition. She thrilled with fury at the idea of any one daring to meddle with a young lady under *her* protection. Could she have transported herself to Maud's side, she would for the moment have defended her at the risk of her own life ; and as she stood like a lioness robbed of her cubs in the lobby of the theatre, her eyes flashing, her voice vibrating with the anger and anxiety that were raging in her soul, all those who knew her, and all those who did not also, exclaimed in one form or another, how touching it was to see Lady Helmsford's deep attachment to her niece.

Owing to information given by some of those who had been loitering about the door, the first attempt at pursuit was made up Drury Lane in a northerly direction ; and, no traces being found, Lady Helmsford, after profuse

promises of reward and punishment, was fain to return home. Her ever-recurring question was, "What has become of Sparrow? These vile wretches who have taken my niece have not surely carried off Sparrow also!" The third or forth repetition of the formula was answered by the appearance of the missing *dame de compagnie*, led by, or rather in the custody of, an official of the theatre, and in sad plight; her rouged cheeks water-worn into small ravines by the tears which had plentifully coursed down them, her dress crumpled and soiled as if she had been kneeling on it in some damp place.

"Sparrow! what is the meaning of this? Where did you find her?" to her custodian.

"I heard sore crying and lamentation, please your ladyship, in a small apartment behind the pay-office, where the pay-clerk keeps his cloak, umbrella and such like. We found the door locked and burst it open, and this lady was within."

"Speak, Sparrow! Do stop crying, you are safe with me!"

"Oh! my dear lady, I thought I was to be murdered! Have you been indisposed? that

new man, Thomas, came, some time after you went to the Princess, with a message from your ladyship that you were ill, but not to frighten Mistress Langley ; so I just said you had sent for me, and followed Thomas. He led me through many passages, and down stairs, and threw open the door of a room. I went in, he closed the door, and when, finding no one there, I tried to open it, it was locked, and ever since have I been in durance."

This was told with many sobs and exclamations.

"It is a deep-laid plot!" cried Lady Helmsford. "Send for some of my people—call that man Thomas!"

But Thomas was nowhere to be found! and as no further tidings seemed forthcoming, and leaving the search in the hands of Lord Chedworth, who had chanced to come into the theatre when Maud's disappearance had been first discovered, Lady Helmsford reluctantly left the theatre, and returned to her residence, severely cross-examining Mrs. Sparrow on their homeward route. "How came you to be so negligent as to quit Mis-

tress Maud?" she asked angrily, reckless of the poor woman's sufferings and excellent excuse, till Mistress Letitia felt she would almost prefer precipitating herself under her ladyship's chariot wheels, to enduring this long-drawn torture.

Arrived at St. James's Square, the Countess despatched a messenger to Mr. Secretary Langley, to acquaint him of his ward's disappearance, and ordered lights *and* Chifferil into the large dining-room on the ground-floor.

"Why, Chifferil, you look as if you had lost your own daughter!" cried the Countess, as she noticed the troubled aspect of her factotum. "'Tis a frightful catastrophe! No doubt this vagabond husband, whom she expected, poor child, to turn out a *rara avis*, has carried her off, and we have no trace. God only knows what horrors may ensue. Where is that old-fashioned attendant of hers? yet stay, she will torment me with her noisy grief. Tell me, Chifferil, what think you? Is Mistress Langley a willing captive?"

"Oh no, madam," cried Chifferil eagerly; and then, stopping himself, resumed: "It is a bold assertion for one who knows so little of

young ladies as myself, yet I feel certain this has been a cunningly-devised scheme to entrap her."

"I think so too," returned Lady Helmsford, who proceeded to recount her version of the event; but before she had quite concluded, Dorothy rushed in, wild with terror and distress.

"Oh! madam!" she cried, "where is my beautiful child? Is this the care you take of your sister's daughter? If I had been by her, I would have torn the flesh off their bones before they should have laid a finger on her. I'll go forth and find her!" and she began to put on the cloak and hood she had brought on her arm.

"But where will you find her, my good woman?" asked the Countess, with unusual forbearance. "Do you think *I* will leave anything undone to save my niece? Were she a princess no more diligent search could be made for her; rest where you are."

"Rest!" repeated Dorothy, sinking on a seat, covering her face with her hands, and rocking herself to and fro. "How can I rest, when she may be calling for me this minnit,

and I can't go to her? Oh! my darlin', my darlin', God guard you, the blessed Virgin and all the saints watch over you!" For Dorothy had the advantage of having been affiliated to two systems, and in an hour such as this, naturally availed herself of the resources of both. "Ah! my lady, mark my words, it is all that villain Langley's doings. Oh, what'll become of me! Where is she gone at all? Nine o'clock past! I shall go mad."

"Don Juan di Monteiro," announced the unhappy butler, who knew what a reckoning awaited him, for engaging a stranger in place of the invalided Truscott.

Monteiro came in quickly; he looked pale and grave, and his left arm was in a sling. Going straight to the Countess he exclaimed: "Be comforted, dear lady! your niece is safe, and only waits your carriage and servants to be restored to you."

"'Twas an angel spoke," cried Dorothy, seizing his hand and kissing it in the rapture of relief. "Safe, do you say! Oh! where, noble gentleman? let me go to her."

"Perfectly safe," replied Monteiro, smiling kindly.

“Leave us—leave us, all of you!” cried the Countess authoritatively. “Go, Dorothy! How dare you attempt to wait!”

“Now, Monteiro—Juan! tell me all! Is the poor child indeed safe and uninjured? I have suffered agonies!” Tears of excitement stood in Lady Helmsford’s eyes; never before had she seemed so lovely to Monteiro, as he noticed these marks of what he thought affection for Maud.

“Fair Countess,” he exclaimed as he took and kissed her hand, “this tenderness becomes you well. I have been so fortunate as to arrest the ruffians in their base design.” He went on to recount, that an old soldier who had formerly served with him, and who was in search of employment, had been engaged to assist in carrying off a lady, he understood with her own consent. Finding the lady was a niece of Lady Helmsford’s, and, from the precautions used, beginning to doubt if she was a consenting party, he at the last moment managed to inform Monteiro, who recapitulated the events of the rescue.

“And Maud?” asked Lady Helmsford, much surprised by this tale.

“Is safe at my lodgings, under the care of my landlady—a kindly respectable woman. Having had this slight hurt attended to, and made myself fit to appear, I ascertained that Mistress Langley was recovering from the shock she had received, and came on to relieve your fears.”

“You left her to relieve my fears?” said Lady Helmsford slowly and thoughtfully, looking earnestly at Monteiro.

“Yes. I should have brought her to you at once, *ma Belle*; but, from D’Arcy’s account, I feared the larger half of the marauding party might still be in the Strand, and possibly attack us. I therefore thought it wiser to come on at once, that you should send your carriage and servants for the young lady. Bold as these ruffians are, they will not venture to attack your people!”

“I will order it forthwith, and Dorothy shall go to bear her company. Ah, Juan! I can scarce say how deep my gratitude is; I have been so miserable about this fair child! It was indeed a gallant rescue; and you have been hurt!” She took his hand tenderly in both her own. “Do you suffer? You have

done me the noblest service—name your reward!” These words were almost whispered, as she softly pressed his hand.

“Reward!” cried Monteiro gaily, “as if service to you and sweet Mistress Langley were not its own reward! But shall you not direct the carriage to be prepared? Maud was eager to be restored to you, and no doubt feels ill at ease in my poor lodgings.”

“Maud!” repeated Lady Helmsford, struck by his familiar mention of her name. “Maud!”

“A thousand pardons!” he exclaimed, endeavouring to cover the slip he had made. “You so often use her name, that in the eagerness of the moment it came naturally to my lips.”

“True,” returned the Countess reflectively; and turning from him touched the bell.

The butler instantly appeared. “The carriage immediately! let four or five of the men go with it—see that they have their staffs! and tell Mistress Langley’s woman to be ready when it comes round.”

“It is already at the door, my lady; and a messenger from my Lord Chedworth has brought this”—handing a note to his mistress.

She hastily tore it open. "He says they have tracked the carriage half way down the Strand, found a dead horse in the road, and gathered from the people living there that a fray had taken place; but that after a while the carriage had moved on. All's well that ends well—thanks to you, Monteiro. I will send a line in reply."

"And Mr. Langley, madam, has gone out to dine—his servants know not where."

"Better so, perhaps! I do not want that solemn prig to-night."

"Why send for him then?" said Monteiro carelessly.

"Do you not see, dear Monteiro, I must! he is her guardian."

"True—the carriage and Mrs. Dorothy are ready?"

"Yes, sir—my lord." The grave butler was not quite sure of the foreign gentleman's status.

"Then, dear Lady Helmsford, *au revoir*. We will delay as little as possible."

"What!" cried the Countess in painful surprise, "you are not going with them?"

"Of a surety yes! I could not think of

trusting your niece to the escort of servants merely. Were any attempt made to stop them, they would want some leader; and besides, for mere courtesy, I could not allow the young lady to——”

“She does not need you, Juan,” said Lady Helmsford earnestly. “She will scarce know if you are there or not.”

“That I dare say,” he replied, with a slight tinge of bitterness in his tone. “Nevertheless, it is but right I should see her safe from my abode to your care—and I will do so. *Au revoir*, Lady Helmsford” — he bowed and turned resolutely away.

The Countess stood a moment in thought, then went hastily out into the hall, in time to see Monteiro hand Dorothy into the carriage with much politeness.

She returned to the dining-room and penned a short note to Lord Chedworth, telling him the lost lamb was found; and then sat in deep thought waiting the arrival of Maud—deep, but not altogether pleasant. The tone in which Monteiro had uttered the words, “This tenderness becomes you well,” dwelt in her ear. It had filled her with delight, it had

sounded like the renewal of bright hopes, for the Countess did not deceive herself of her own feeling. She well knew how intensely and passionately she loved this man who treated her with a kindness and courtesy maddening in their friendly coldness. It was foolish, this determination of his to attend personally Maud's transit from his lodgings; but by no means extraordinary—nothing she could cavil at—nevertheless, she did not like it; and, strive to banish it as she would, that and his familiar mention of Maud's name would recur to her. “He has scarce seen or spoken to her,” thought the haughty Countess. “And though she is a graceful girl, she has not *my* beauty; she is cold and colourless, while I——” She rose, surveyed herself in the glass, and then rang for Beville to attend her in her dressing-room, whither she retired to repair damages and prepare for action by the time the convoy returned.

“What has become of Sparrow?” she asked.

“Oh! indeed, my lady, she is more dead than alive—she is gone to bed, and the housekeeper has made her a posset.”

“She is a foolish creature! I wonder I

am troubled with her ! Had you been in charge of Mistress Langley you would not have let her slip."

"Your ladyship is very good."

The time seemed very long till the return of Monteiro and Dorothy with their charge, but they came at last.

The Countess went out into the hall to receive them, and when Maud, clinging to her good nurse and followed by Monteiro, crossed the threshold, Lady Helmsford, with an impulse very unusual to her, and springing from very complex sources, held out her arms to the pallid, trembling girl whose emotion at being thus received was not unmingled with pain. Maud threw herself into the offered embrace, clinging fondly to her aunt, and as they stood thus under the light of the hall lamp, Monteiro met Lady Helmsford's eyes with a glance so soft and tender that the thought thrilled through her, "He must love me ; and some motive unknown to me holds him back."

"Oh ! thank God ! I am with you again," whispered Maud ; "I will never leave your sight again !"

“Really, my sweet niece,” cried the Countess, with a bright but kindly smile, “your custody is almost as onerous a charge as the guardianship of Castle Dangerous. All the world seems bent on winning you!”

“Or my possible inheritance, dear madam,” said Maud wearily.

“Come, you must sorely need refreshment,” returned the Countess, motioning as if to lead her to the dining-room.”

“No, no indeed, dear aunt, only rest!” She ventured to lean her head against Lady Helmsford’s shoulder as she spoke. “The kind landlady at—at—Monsieur de Monteiro’s lodgings supplied all my wants.”

It was well Maud had instinctively hidden her face, for at the effort to speak Monteiro’s name, her cheeks reddened painfully.

“Let me then go to my room with Dorothy. I have caused you enough disturbance, dear aunt; I only want rest;” these words were spoken falteringly.

“Well, I believe it is kindest to let you retire; here, Dorothy, see to your mistress. Beville!”—for the upper servants had crowded

into the hall to witness the return of the young lady whose disappearance had dismayed them.—“Beverly! go—offer what assistance you can.”

“And where—oh! where is poor Mistress Sparrow?” cried Maud, suddenly remembering her and looking round.

“Oh, Sparrow!” said Lady Helmsford, laughing, “she is in sorry case! the wretches entrapped her into some den and locked her up! Judging from her plight I imagine she spent the time of her imprisonment crawling about on her knees imploring the unseen powers for aid. You owe her a new silk dress, Maud, if you ever get your own. She too has retired to rest.”

“Then I will wish you good-night,” returned Maud, making a strong effort to be composed, and moving away from Lady Helmsford she looked round the persons assembled, avoiding Monteiro’s glance. A sort of congratulatory murmur rose from them. Maud, with a surprisingly grand, yet natural air, smiled and said, “I thank you, good people, for your friendly interest.”

“We have all offered hearty prayers for

your restoration," returned Chifferil, stepping forward as spokesman of the household.

Maud curtsied slightly, then turning to Monteiro, with downcast eyes and delicate graceful hesitation, held out one hand while she rested the other on Dorothy's arm.

"I pray you, sir," she said, soft and low, "believe ever in my deep gratitude."

Monteiro bent his knee as to a sovereign, and lightly touched her fingers with his lips, but he did not utter a word. Then offering her brow to her aunt's kiss, Maud, still leaning on Dorothy's arm, slowly ascended the staircase, Monteiro standing where he was when she turned away, following her receding figure with his eyes, forgetful for the moment of everything else, and Lady Helmsford absorbed in watching *him*. He first recalled himself. "Come!" he exclaimed, offering her his hand; "come, dear Countess, you must need rest and refreshment as much as any one;" and he led her into the dining-room, where Lady Helmsford, more disturbed than she cared to acknowledge to herself by the irresistible attraction Maud's vanishing form seemed to have for Monteiro's eyes,

threw herself into a large arm-chair by the fire, determined to ascertain if possible his feelings. Dissimulation was peculiarly irksome to her bold proud nature, but there were no means too low, too tortuous, for the desperate game she was resolved to play.

"She is a fair child and a noble!" exclaimed the Countess in an easy tone, as though no other thought was in her heart, to Monteiro, who was thinking how he could best and soonest get away. "Marked you the air with which she spoke to the servants?"

"She is worthy to be your niece," said Monteiro, with a complimentary smile.

"Nay, sir, she has a beauty all her own," replied Lady Helmsford, shaking her fan playfully at him. "Do you think I cannot see and acknowledge merit in others?"

"You can well afford to be generous! But, fair Countess, I must wish you good-night."

"What, so soon! Will you not sup with me? Why, you must be exhausted, what with journeying to and fro, and beating off—how many?"

"Twelve men in buckram," returned Monteiro, laughing. "Indeed, I must resist

such temptation! Moreover, though 'tis scarce worth mentioning, my arm is somewhat stiff; now my valet is a good surgeon, and the sooner he sees to it the better; therefore——”

“Ah! why return then, dear Juan?” cried Lady Helmsford, eagerly seizing the chance thus offered. “Rest *here*; you shall have all care in my house; I will send for Doctor R——, and I will nurse you myself!”

“Am I not the highest living example of virtue,” exclaimed Monteiro, “to resist such a temptation? With *you* for a nurse I should be invalided for life; I should never have strength of mind to resign your care. No, no, gracious lady!”

“Wherefore *resist* or *resign*, Juan?” returned the Countess, looking down upon her fan. “Do you think I fear slanderous tongues too much to follow the impulse of my heart? Moreover, there is ever the means of stopping them.”

“I should be unworthy the name of man were I to permit you to forget yourself for me,” cried Monteiro, with an air of devotion.

“Suffer me to see you to-morrow, dear lady ; I must confer with my good friend D’Arcy to-night, and I fear he will be gone ere I can return.”

“To-morrow then, Juan,” murmured the Countess, the light fading from her eyes. “And this D’Arcy—I should like to see and reward him myself—he seems a brave man and true.”

“He is—he is ; but somewhat rough for your presence, madam !”

“We must not be too fine to handle the tools wherewith we work,” replied Lady Helmsford, more to herself than her companion. “To-morrow then, Juan,” she spoke it somewhat sadly, for his will always dominated hers, which was probably the secret of his fascination ; “and send D’Arcy to me soon—any day before noon.”

“Good-night then, *belle dame*,” said Monteiro, taking her hand and putting it to his lips. “Ah ! could that fair girl’s mother look down upon her from a brighter world, how she would bless the tender sister’s care that shelters her child !”—a piece of sentiment which Monteiro intended should score to

Maud's advantage, but which produced an exactly contrary effect.

"My sister," muttered Lady Helmsford, looking after him as he closed the door. "His mention of her is a warning."

Above in the peaceful seclusion of her own chamber Maud, freed from all restraints, enjoyed the relief of a flood of tears in Dorothy's arms.

"Oh! dear, dear old friend, when shall we have quiet and safety?"

"In God's good time," returned Dorothy piously. "Now get to your bed, mavourneen; I'll not ask you a word till you have rested, and your hands have lost the *thrimble*."

Maud gratefully accepted the truce, and closed her eyes—long before she slept. In the stillness, Monteiro's voice seemed still to sound in her ear, and the warmth and tenderness of his tones to haunt her heart—"My own! my wife!" It was strangely terrifying to be thus appropriated, and he was utterly different from the ideal she had formed of her unknown husband! Yet Monteiro had shown great delicacy and consideration for her; but for

that terrible doubt of his sincerity, suggested by his relations with her aunt, he might have been satisfied with the result of her meditations—this doubt, however, was fatal.

And Dorothy, too, had her uneasy thoughts while she watched by her young lady's couch long after she seemed to be asleep.

“It's mighty quare altogether,” she reflected. “That Mr. Monteiro is a real fine man, and an elegant gentleman, but I'm just the laste taste afraid of him; there is the divil's own fire in his eyes sometimes. It was mighty dark as we come along, but I am pretty sure I saw him take her hand in both his own and hould it to his heart! Ah! they are all the same, thieves of the world they are! Anyway he was wonderful polite to me; a tongue that would wheedle the birds off trees ye have, Mr. Monteiro, or whoever you are! Well, well, only leave my bird alone, and work what mischief ye like elsewhere. But if my lady gets a glint of your love-making to my child, what will become of us at all, at all! Ah! isn't she ready to ate him? God preserve us!”



CHAPTER VI.

THE absence of John Langley on the eventful night described in the last chapter, was part of the plot. He was of course aware that the Countess would immediately send for him, and thought it as well to be out of the way.

It was late (at least for him) before he returned, and great was his dismay to find a note from his hopeful son awaiting him.

“The grand scheme is blown to the winds. Come to me to-morrow; I have a broken arm and a skinful of sore bones.” So ran the epistle, and Langley was obliged to devour his impatience, or let it devour him, as best he might till morning. The news, too, that Lady

Helmsford had sent, seeking him, showed that some attempt on Maud had been made, as her ladyship would certainly not have sought him without some strong necessity.

When, however, the whole tale was revealed, his rage was only one part of his disturbance. A sudden conviction pressed upon him, that some dexterous friend to Maud and enemy to himself watched over her.

“I tell you, sir,” cried Harold, “that cursed Spaniard has something to do with it. The fellow who fired the first shot was just his height, and that treacherous dog whom Strange or Morley, whichever he be, put such faith in, called out in some queer lingo just before the shots were fired. Moreover, I have seen the dog somewhere before.”

“But how came it that you, who were—let me see—six with the postillions, were overcome by three? at least, I cannot make out that you had more than three assailants.”

“Why, there might have been more, the whole affair was so short; we were going as fast as the infernal road would let us, when crack! crack! down went the leader and the rest on top of him. My good grey tumbled

on his head, and I fell with my right arm doubled under me; I managed though to pull the trigger of my pistol—mine was the only one among us (it was a mistake not to have more firearms)—and aimed as well as I could with the left hand at the fellow who was making to the carriage door. Then, knowing that my wrist was useless, I went as fast as I could to find those rascals who should have joined us before. They were ever so far down the Strand, and by the time we returned the game was up, the bird flown, and not a trace of the rescuers to be found.”

John Langley sat in silent thought.

“‘Tis passing strange,” he said at length. “I think, Harold, had I been in your place, I should have made a better fight.”

“God’s blood, sir! I am not a conjuror! the thing lies in a nutshell, our secret was not kept, some one betrayed us to a man of no common daring and resource, and *that* some one was the silent rusty fellow Strange called the ‘Blazer.’ He is nowhere to be found. I met the other two in full flight, one was winged—they have dispersed.”

“Ay,” returned Langley, writhing in his

chair ; “ but I warrant they’ll apply for their guerdon. However, they were to have but half pay if they failed—but this is all beside the matter. ’Tis the first serious check I have had for twenty years ! Lord Langdale gone—Rupert out of the way—nothing but this insignificant girl left, and she the very stepping-stone by which to reach the goal of my ambition, yet she becomes an insurmountable barrier. Insurmountable ! nay, that is a cowardly word. I’ll *never* give up my grasp on Langdale—it shall be yours yet, my boy.”

“ Zounds, sir ! if you could get it for me, free and unencumbered by Mistress Maud, I would say thank you ; but I begin to weary of so difficult and dangerous a suit.”

“ Ay, Harold ! but once *yours*, what a wealth of vengeance you could exact ! The power which a husband holds by law, judiciously and legally used, may make any woman’s life a burden to her.”

“ Perhaps so, sir ! but I would rather spend my own in a more cheerful and agreeable manner than in plaguing myself in order to torture my wife, though I confess I should

like to pay off some of the long reckoning I owe Mistress Langley."

"You have no fixity of purpose," returned the elder man; "this failure only makes *me* more resolute in the pursuit of mine. But we must never risk such another attempt as this; it is but one more proof of the weakness of force compared to craft. I must see and settle with these ruffians. You are certain none could recognise you—you were masked?"

"Yes, and never spoke, save to Strange. None of the party could know me again."

"Well, so far! the fellow shall not know me either, for it would be worse for me to be suspected than you. Harold, this escapade will cost me a hideous sum!"

"You cannot say it was my invention, sir."

"I do not Harold: now for our future proceedings. You had better be laid up with fever from overwrought feelings and love for your charming betrothed. I will ply Lord Sunderland with prayers for the reversal of the attainder, and will even consent to sell him most of my precious South Sea stock (of which I shall not be sorry to be rid); he shall

be well primed by the time the King returns. Meantime this outrage is a good excuse for insisting that my ward be restored to my custody. If I love her not 'tis her own fault; had she yielded to my wishes all would have been well for her and us, but her insolent opposition and defiance, although she must feel herself a beggarly dependent, the—the rebel pride—the indomitable will I can neither soothe nor crush, has roused a spirit in me which shall cost her dear. Why, her father was wax in my hands compared to this chit!”

“What she can see to dislike in *me*, I cannot imagine,” said Harold, with candour; “perhaps she was taken up with some low fellow in France.”

“I neither know nor care,” returned his father; “but I can stay no longer here. My first task is to clear the wreck of our enterprise, and get rid of those fellows; I imagine the boasting of Strange, or rather Morley, has fixed the credit of it pretty firmly on himself. Then I must see her Majesty of Helmsford, and claim my ward. You must keep out of sight, Harold, until your arm is restored; be

sure you do not solace your idle hours with dice or cards. I have reached the limits of my patience."

So saying, Master Langley with a cloudy brow left his son and took coach to Hatton Garden.

It was past mid-day, and Lady Helmsford, having finished her matutinal chocolate and received a report of Mistress Maud Langley's condition from Dorothy, sent for her *dame de compagnie*, who was unusually slow in obeying the summons, for the poor soul had lingered long in bed to rest and compose herself.

When at last she appeared in a terribly nervous condition, expecting a repetition of the cross-examination and torture of the previous night, she was greatly relieved, indeed almost melted to tears, by being graciously received.

"Come hither, Sparrow," cried her mistress; "have you recovered your senses yet? On my word, I think we all lost them last night! I see now that Hobson was the real source of all the mischief. How he dared to engage a

stranger without due inquiry in Truscott's place, I cannot think ; that stupid little Chifferil has been telling me he warned Hobson against him."

"And so he did, my lady ; I remember his saying he did, one evening he and Mrs. Dorothy took tea with me."

"Then he should have told me, when he knew the danger that threatened my niece ; however, Hobson is dismissed."

"And I hope that sweet Mistress Langley has recovered her sore trial and is more composed."

"She is well enough," said Lady Helmsford carelessly ; "I mean, that strange woman of hers says she is very ill at ease, vapourish, and unwell—'tis not to be wondered at ; but, Sparrow, you are a well-meaning soul, and I know a friend to my niece."

The Countess smiled with such unusual condescension that Mistress Letitia was almost awed, nevertheless much flattered.

"I am sure, my lady, besides her being your niece, I feel disposed to love the young lady for her own sake."

"No doubt she is a fair child, and it is my

duty to guard her carefully. Tell me, Sparrow, that day when Don Juan di Monteiro met you on the Mall, did you observe anything of a mutual understanding — anything —” interrupting herself, “you know enough of our Spanish friend to be aware that he is not over-scrupulous where pleasure or adventure is to be found.”

Mistress Letitia knew no such thing, but she was quite ready to take it for granted, so she shook her head with a shocked expression of countenance.

“Such an one should not be allowed access heedlessly to a young girl’s ear,” continued her mistress. “Not that Monteiro is any worse than others, but he is not a suitable husband for Maud ; her guardian would accuse me of negligence, in short. Speak !” cried the Countess, with sudden vehemence, no longer able to endure the task of dissimulation ; “tell me every syllable that passed.”

“Indeed, my lady, it is but little I can tell ; they spoke chiefly in French,” said Letitia, with the haste of fear.

“French !” repeated the Countess, turning uneasily in her luxurious bed, for there she

received her household frequently when indisposed, *i.e.*, lazy or thoughtful. "Infamous! tell me, who spoke most?"

"Oh, Mistress Langley by far the most, with smiles and gestures, as though relating some tale."

"Indeed, and Monteiro—how looked he?"

"Mostly on the ground, and said little, till I said as it was not good manners to speak a tongue I had nearly forgotten; then we all spoke English, and Monsieur de Monteiro told us wondrous tales of foreign lands."

"Then, Sparrow," said the Countess, after a moment's thought, "would it not be well to warn Mistress Langley of this man's character? I do not mean an open coarse warning, but during friendly conversation you might drop hints respecting it."

"But, dear madam, in truth I know nothing beyond the most uncertain reports about the gentleman; that he loved pleasure and——"

"What!" cried the Countess, raising herself on her elbow, "do you mean to say you never heard of his duel with M. de Martigny on

account of that pretty foolish Marquise de Boisville? or the story of the nun taken from a convent somewhere near Brest and carried on board his ship?"

"Oh! dear me! how shocking! Is this all true?"

"Nay, that I will not answer for! 'twas so reported, and there is always some foundation for reports. I merely suggest the mention of such matters in casual conversation, just as a warning; you might also add that I hesitated to accept his offers, fearful that he was scarce steady enough to trust."

"You! you, my lady!" stammered poor Letitia, utterly overwhelmed by this mark of confidence.

"Yes; you knew he was my suitor, I suppose?"

"No doubt he was ever your ladyship's suitor; but marriage——"

"Curb your evil imagination," said Lady Helmsford carelessly. "It is true I hesitate respecting him, but he is noble and suitable, still I hesitate. Come, Sparrow, you are not without tact; exercise it to save Mistress Maud some useless pangs; but, on your life,

do not quote me as your authority ! Sparrow, you understand me ?”

“ Certainly ! I—I understand ; shall I see Mistress Langley to-day ?”

“ To-morrow may do as well ; be guided by circumstances. And, Sparrow, send for Madame Hortense ; order yourself a new silk dress—my only limit is that it must be grey or black. Now give me my writing-materials, ring for Beville, and go. I hope Mab and Tab have been properly attended to in all this confusion ; I will see the little brutes when I am dressed.”

Having obeyed these diverse orders, Mistress Sparrow curtsied and went out unnoticed ; looking timidly round her she stole quickly to her own room, and there indulged in that curious luxury, as it is undoubtedly considered by persons of her peculiar temperament—a good cry.

Lady Helmsford's confidence had greatly astonished her : moreover, in spite of her humble sincere admiration for the potentate she served, she instinctively understood her in some of her aspects, and could not find that she in her heart believed the great lady's

assertion that Monteiro was a suitor for her hand. She had a sincere liking for the handsome Spaniard, who showed her a degree of kindly courtesy she did not always experience, and though she had a sort of admiring credulity for the tales that had been whispered of him, she did not think him really "bad." In spite of her reassuring answers to Lady Helmsford, she had noticed the eagerness with which Monteiro at times, when off his guard, hung on Maud's looks and words; and she had refreshed her own poor heart, where the withered rose-leaves of youth had still some fragrance, preserved as they were by the spices of genuine kindness, good faith, and simplicity (as the sweet petals of bygone summers are kept in *pot-pourri*, which one associates with the delicate housekeeping of tender women, whom experience cannot harden)—she had, we say, refreshed her heart with a little romance, of which Maud and Monteiro were the hero and heroine, and that very morning she had, in her own mind, brought it to a climax, with the help of the gallant rescue of the night before. Now, here was that terrible eagle of a Countess

swooping down on the dovecot she had nearly arranged to her mind. That Lady Helmsford would be a sad obstacle to the course of true love she always felt, but she never anticipated her stepping thus openly down into the arena. The result of poor Letitia's tears and cogitations was a very muddled condition of mind. First, and above all, she would avoid all private conversation with Mistress Maud; but then it would be right to warn her that for her own sake she must not have anything to do with the Cavalier, who had so fascinated the Countess; yet, in so doing, she would not slander that pleasant bright-eyed Monteiro; though, after all, perhaps, to act on Lady Helmsford's hint would be the best and kindest line to adopt towards the inexperienced girl, who might break her heart if she was left too long in ignorance of the projected alliance between her aunt, and her deliverer; for, after all, the grand beauty of the Countess, backed by her rank and wealth, might well outweigh Maud's girlish grace and doubtful heritage, and Lady Helmsford's words might prove to be true in the end.

“Well, well—I am sure I do not know

what's best to be done," was the only approach to a conclusion she could come to ; and hoping to conciliate and benefit every one by this limpness of intention, she went away to attend to the wants of Mab and Tab.

Before Lady Helmsford's first toilette was quite accomplished, "Mr. John Langley" was announced.

"That man has a trick of ever catching me at the glass, Beville," said the Countess. "I will e'en see him in *déshabille*—it will look more troubled ! He is such an unsociable owl that I doubt if he has heard of last night's misadventure, though no doubt my messenger gossiped to his servants."

"Mr. Chifferil gave strict orders that he should say nought beyond the words he was to deliver, my lady."

"Does any one mind Chifferil, think you ? Give me that coral *négligé*, I may as well wear it ; and, Beville, should Don Monteiro call, let him be shown into my boudoir ; I do not want him to meet Langley."

Wrapped in a loose bedgown, as it was called, of blue cashmere edged with fur, her hair carelessly rolled up under a Mechlin lace

cap, Lady Helmsford made her appearance with much less of ceremony than she had assumed in her first interview with John Langley, whom she found waiting in the library. She was struck by his worn, haggard aspect, and anxious to ascertain if he knew of the attempt which had been made to carry off his ward. Langley was the first to open fire.

“I have to apologise for not obeying your ladyship’s summons earlier, but I was obliged to visit my son, who is severely indisposed, even before presenting myself here.”

“Indeed, I regret to hear it, sir,” cried the Countess, looking sharply at him; then, not seeing any trace of the knowledge she sought, she dashed into the admission which she detested—that an attempt had been made to molest her niece while under the sacred ægis of her protection. “What, Master Langley, is it possible that you have not heard of the attack upon your ward last night! We have all been at our wit’s end with fright; but, thank Heaven, she is restored, and safely lodged in her chamber above.”

“Attack, madam! Restored! I do not

follow you." John Langley looked at her with stern displeasure, which might or might not be surprise.

"I must recount the affair," replied Lady Helmsford, motioning him to be seated ; and placing herself opposite, she related the events of the previous night—so far as she knew them.

Langley listened with an air of grave condemnation that, let her choose her phrases how she would, made the Countess feel as though she were confessing failure and pleading excuse. When she had finished her tale, she sat looking at Langley with a smile intended to convey her indifference to his opinion. He kept silence for some time, and then, in tones more than usually harsh, observed :

"This is a grave matter, and, I confess, disturbs me much. I did indeed hope that my young ward would be well cared for with your ladyship ; you must pardon me if I say the misadventure would not have occurred had she been in my custody."

"I cannot see that I was in any way to blame, my good sir. The plot was deep laid ;

and you see, had she been taken from *you*, she would not have been so ready to return, which would have been no small additional difficulty."

"Granted, madam; although it is not safe to count on the whims of so young a dame. May I ask the name of the gallant who bestowed so great a service upon us?"

"A distinguished foreigner—Don Juan di Monteiro—well known to me."

"I should like personally to present my acknowledgments to him," said John Langley slowly; "and, I confess also, to judge the qualities of a man likely to prove a rival to my son."

"How do you mean?" asked the Countess, a scornful smile curling her lip.

"What a lady of your experience must well understand," he replied. "A young lady will be sure to be fascinated by the brave man who rescued her from outrage."

"Oh, make your mind easy on that score," exclaimed Lady Helmsford carelessly, though with rage in her soul: but Langley went on as if he had not heard her:

"Would that my poor boy had been at

hand to play the deliverer's part, instead of being stretched on the fevered couch to which Mistress Maud's whims and your ladyship's double-dealing have driven him" (these last words with much bitterness).

"How *dare* you speak thus to me!" cried the Countess, starting back resentfully, as if from a blow, at these insulting words—to her, who scarce ever heard anything save adulation and compliments. "Explain yourself, or never show your face to me again."

"*That* I would undertake readily enough," said Langley, who was now resolved to brave this haughty woman, and assert his legal rights, unless she yielded somewhat to him; "nor do I hesitate to say that while you have kept your word in the letter, you have broken it in spirit. You permit my son to see his affianced wife, 'tis true, but only amid a crowd, where men of all grades have equal if not freer access to her than himself, you——"

"Hold, sir," interrupted Lady Helmsford, pale with indignation; "what do you mean by men of all grades? Heavens! your son never was in such company in his life before,

as any one could see. If you venture to address me in this strain——”

“I say men of all grades,” interrupted Langley in his turn, but preserving a certain weighty resolute composure that incensed his hearer even more than his words——“I say men of all grades, for they range from my Lord Chedworth to the latest adventurer floating on the tide of fashion—the reformed pirate, his Excellency Don Juan di Monteiro. Yes, madam, I have thought it my duty to inquire a little into the history of the ‘distinguished foreigner’ admitted to the society of my ward and future daughter-in-law.”

Something of deadly intent in his voice recalled Lady Helmsford to the necessity of self-control. The instinct of love warned her that here was a bitter mortal foe to Monteiro ; and also proved to her, as a sudden lightning-flash displays vividly for an instant, on a dark night, the outline of a country hitherto shrouded, that Harold Langley must have observed something to rouse his jealousy——something that had escaped her.

“I think, Mr. Langley,” she said more calmly, “you must be mistaken. I knew

Monteiro in Paris : he was received in good society, and well connected both in France and Spain. Some of his people (as in many noble families) may have had to do with buccaneering, but I doubt if he was ever engaged therein. As to myself, it is so new to me to hear disrespectful words, I scarce know how to meet them. I see before me an indignant father, no doubt ; but pray be just, sir. Consider that my house is always open to the society I move in. I could not exclude my friends, or seclude my niece in her chamber. She is fair and fresh, and people admire her. I am grieved your son is sick ; but you must not take all he says as absolute fact—jealousy may have tinged his view—though, believe me, let the source of his sickness be what it may, it is not love for Maud.”

“ How can you tell that, madam ?” returned Langley, who had listened with a moody and downcast look to this speech.

“ Come, Master Langley !” said the Countess, “ surely your own love-making days are not so far bygone that you cannot recall some symptoms of the pleasant disorder ?”

“ Mine has been a lot so differently cast

from your ladyship's that I have had no time for such fine fancies. Mine has been the light scorn, or, at best, the smiling compassion men cast upon one displaced by the error of others! Accident has doomed me to poverty and toil and obscurity; and if, in the desperate struggle by which I have nearly surmounted all these, my hands have acquired a grasp too strong to relax at the touch of a fine lady's delicate fingers, blame my circumstances, not me. Let me take my ward and go forth. I will be more careful of her safety than you have been."

"Too fast, too fast!" cried Lady Helmsford; "you cannot take your ward to-day. And, sir, indeed I meant no offence by my careless speech,"—the gloomy strength of the man touched some responsive chord in her many-sided nature. "But you are serious in your intention to remove my niece?"

"I am, madam! The legal right I have hitherto waived in courtesy to you I shall now enforce."

"I can but say she is unfit to leave the house—she is ill in bed," replied the Countess, watching him narrowly.

Langley was silent for a moment.

"I should like to see her myself, madam."

"You shall," said Lady Helmsford, determined to do nothing he could object to justly, and feeling she had to deal with a man she could neither dominate nor cajole. She rose and rang. "Send Mistress Langley's woman to me!" was her order. And the antagonists kept silent till it was obeyed—a considerable time—but both had ample food for reflection.

When Dorothy entered, and beheld John Langley's dark figure and dour face, she felt, to use her own expression, "as if the life would leave her," and, as usual in cases of great emergency, took refuge in the earlier of her two religious systems—making a furtive sign of the cross.

"How fares your mistress, Dorothy?" asked the Countess.

"Bad enough, my lady," dropping a curtsy to Langley, of which he took no notice; "she had but broken rest, and is weeping sore at times."

"Her guardian, Mr. Langley, wishes to see her."

"Deed and he can do no such thing, my lady!

She is in her bed, and I do not think she could stand upon her feet if she were to get out of it."

"I desire to see the young lady, in her bed or out of it," returned Langley, with cold persistency; "and I will."

"If you would call to-morrow, or even this evening," said Lady Helmsford, "Mistress Maud shall be ready to receive you."

"Your ladyship is obliging," returned Langley, with a *not* agreeable smile; "much might occur between this and to-morrow, or this and two hours hence. I will ascertain that my niece is in the house now."

"Very well, sir!" cried Lady Helmsford, roused to her highest mettle; "you *shall* see her now, and never again shall you enter my doors; be wise, and do not presume to try my patience too far. If I declare war against you, you will find me no mean antagonist."

"I must even endure the fortunes of war," replied Langley grimly. "You cannot deny my right to see my ward, nor she refuse to receive, even in her bedroom, a man who stands to her in *loco parentis*."

"Sure you wouldn't force yourself into her

room!" cried Dorothy. "My lady, it will just finish her to see his—— his honour," she rapidly substituted for some expression far from complimentary to his appearance.

"I feel flattered by the supposed effect I may produce; but, madam," to Lady Helmsford, "if I leave without seeing her now, I shall return, backed by authority even you dare not resist."

"Go, Dorothy! prepare your mistress for his coming," was Lady Helmsford's reply, as, with a quick mental glance at the position, she saw the strength which refusal would give to Langley. "Go! I will conduct Mr. Langley myself."

With a look of bewilderment Dorothy obeyed, and hastened with all speed to her young lady's room. She found her partly dressed, as she had already risen when Dorothy had been sent for.

"Oh, my jewel!" she exclaimed, "that black-browed devil of an uncle of yours is coming up the stairs this minit to see you here! Let me do up your hair and wrap your dressing-gown round ye. I swore you were ill in bed, but nothing would stop him!"

“But the Countess, Dorothy! surely she will not permit——”

“Oh, she spake up like a Trojan, and she is coming with him herself. Now just keep up your heart—don’t be frightened.”

“Certainly not!” replied Maud, trying to be brave while her heart sank within her. “You say my aunt is with him?”

“Yes; and you trust her! She is fit to tear his eyes out—hush! I hear then in the next room.”

Dorothy opened the door and said, “My mistress will be with you immediately.” Returning, she completed Maud’s hasty toilette, and ushered her into the pretty apartment adjoining the bedroom, which was as gay as bright-patterned curtains, pastels, mirrors, and china could make it. Here the Countess stood by the fireplace, drawn up to her full height, her lips compressed and an ominous stillness over her whole figure.

John Langley had placed himself in one of the windows, his face expressive of dogged resolution. Both looked towards Maud as she came in—her pale colourless cheeks and the dark shade under her eyes proving how

much she had been shaken by the severe shock she had undergone.

She went straight to Lady Helmsford and offered her cheek to be kissed, then said courteously to Langley :

“Thank you, my uncle, for coming to ask after me. I am sorely upset, but shall no doubt soon recover.”

“I hope so,” returned Langley, a little startled by her composure, and the peculiar penetrating look she sent into his eyes. “I am pleased to see you so far well ; you will be able, to-morrow or next day, to return to the home you quitted so unadvisedly. Your affianced husband lies ill—struck down by fever—and when he is restored I mean to endure no further paltering with your duty. It will be your own fault if your destiny be not fair and smooth.”

Strangeto say, neither approached nor offered a hand to the other. Langley seemed to feel that some fresh barrier, he knew not what, had arisen between him and Maud, while she could not bring herself to take a hand which she knew had taken the life of a fellow-creature, and that a near relative. The words

he spoke struck a mortal chill through her heart, but pride lent her courage to keep an unbroken front.

“My destiny is not in your hands,” she said gravely. “Save on one point, you well know I am ready to yield you obedience.”

“And on that point—” began Langley.

“Enough !” interrupted the Countess. “I imagine, Mr. Langley, you must now be satisfied. Let us discuss the question of my niece’s removal in the library. You can see yourself it would be injudicious cruelty to persecute the poor child at present. Go to your room, my love ; I will see you when I am at liberty. Follow me, Master Langley.”

She swept out of the room, and Langley felt compelled to obey. When they reached the library, Lady Helmsford did not offer her guest a chair, but stood by a large writing-table, her eyes fixed upon Langley without speaking for a few moments. At last she exclaimed :

“Well, sir—”

“Well, madam,” he returned dryly.

“What are your intentions ?”

“To remove my ward so soon as she has

recovered the shock of this attack ; and wed her to my son, if he recovers the malady she has brought upon him."

"*She* has brought upon him ! Pshaw ! Don't tell me that your son loves my niece ! I know the difference between love and hatred, and if he has any feeling for her it is the latter. I read it in both *your* and his eyes. I believe you are both ready to take a life that balks your schemes. Now, learn my intentions. Maud has taken refuge under my roof. Had a dog done so I would defend him—much more Langdale's daughter. I will *not* give her up to you ; but I shall have this wretched marriage dissolved, and wed her to Lord Chedworth, who craves the honour of an alliance with my niece. Before ten days are over I shall petition the King and the Chancellor to transfer the guardianship to *me*, and then you and your love-sick son may burn Queen Anne's pardon, *if* you find it, and wheedle Lord Sunderland out of the heritage that should be Maud's. Now, sir, do you understand me ?"

"I think, madam, we understand each other. There remains only a trial of strength."

Lady Helmsford had rung the bell while she spoke.

"The door," she exclaimed to the servant who entered. "The door—Mr. Langley is going out."

"I wish you good-day, madam."

The Countess made an elaborate and dignified curtsey as her only reply, and John Langley followed the footman.

On the door-steps he paused and thought a while, then, stepping into his chair, ordered the men to carry him to the Admiralty.

The Countess, still glowing with the pleasurable excitement of having defied Langley, went quickly upstairs to condole with her niece, and found Dorothy bathing her temples with water, as though she were faint.

"The unmannerly brute! The low-bred clown!" cried Lady Helmsford, seating herself beside Maud and taking one of her hands. "He has quite terrified and upset you—nor am I surprised."

"I am not so ill as Dorothy imagines, madam," said Maud faintly, as she pressed Lady Helmsford's hand.

"'Deed and she is, my lady," said Dorothy.

“Her heart beat so fast when he had gone out she could scarce get her breath. Mark my words, all this fighting about her will just put her in her grave; why, it’s enough to curl the blood in her veins!”

“Take courage, Maud,” exclaimed the Countess, now roused by her indignation against Langley to tenderness for her niece; “none shall harm you while you are with me, and guided by me! Be advised! Wed Lord Chedworth at once—next week—and you will be rich, adored, free, powerful. Rouse yourself! dress, take courage, come down to dinner. I will send for his lordship—be gracious to him—to-morrow he will implore you personally to have pity on him. You can take a day to consider. Next day he will want to be married at all risks. I will intercede for him, summon the parson, and then let John Langley do his worst. ’Tis a marriage all must approve!”

Anxious, miserable, frightened though she was, Maud could not refrain from a fit of laughter, somewhat hysterical, it is true, at this idea of wedding her out of hand while yet the passionate prayer of her real husband haunted her ear.

"Ah! dear aunt," she said, "is there no way of disposing of me save in marriage? Have you no country-seat where you might give Dorothy and myself a nook, where I might see that the gardens were kept in fair order, and Dorothy care for the napery? We would cost you but little, and oh! what a boon would be the peace and security!"

"And pray how long would this enterprising bridegroom of yours leave you in peace, foolish child? I tell you marriage—marriage with my consent or John Langley's—and marriage with a powerful man, is your only chance."

"That's true for you, my lady," said Dorothy.

But Maud did not reply at once. At the mention of her husband her cheeks and delicate throat were bathed in a quick crimson flush. From a vague and pleasant dream this husband had suddenly sprung into a startling and embarrassing reality, of which she must not speak even to dear, good Dorothy. This was her sorest trial; she could take no counsel—she must brood over her difficulty alone.

Meantime Lady Helmsford and Dorothy

were executing a sort of duet in favour of a marriage with Lord Chedworth. The noble position, the security, wealth, influence, etc., etc., it would bestow. Dorothy, at the conclusion, jumping to a sort of anti-climax after a momentary lull in the panegyric, exclaiming with a sudden outbreak :

“ Sure he’s mighty old, anyhow, for a young creature like Mistress Maud !”

“ Pooh ! nonsense, woman !” returned the Countess. “ Come, Maud ! how say you ?—dine with me to-day—I will send for Lord Chedworth, and your gallant deliverer, Monteiro. We shall be a *parti carrée*—not a bad thing in its way—and see if our four wits cannot devise a plan to defy John Langley.”

“ No, dear aunt, I could not leave my room to-day,” cried Maud, her colour coming and going. “ Leave me to my own thoughts—to perfect quiet—and to-morrow or the next day I may be fitter to devise plans with you. I do so want quiet and repose !”

“ Very well, child, I will leave you ! I expect Don Juan and the man who helped so largely in your rescue ; then to-night I must

visit Leicester House to give the history of your rescue—for eager gossip, there is nothing like a Royal Highness. And I am deeply engaged to-morrow. However, rest ; you must require it. I will send Sparrow to see you in the evening. Adieu.”



CHAPTER VII.

IT was some three or four days after the events above recorded. Monteiro was writing at the table in the principal room of his lodgings. Papers and letters were lying beside him, and in a large chair opposite was seated the huge form of Robilliard, while by the fireplace stood D'Arcy—D'Arcy in his quiet stockbroking garments. Monteiro, after writing for a few minutes, laid down the pen, and taking up an open letter that lay at his elbow, reperused it, the others keeping respectful silence. He was somewhat thinner and more worn-looking than when first we saw him, but his expression was alert and hopeful.

“You have indeed brought me good news, Robilliard. When did this reach you?”

“Early this morning, sir ; and I determined to place it in your hand myself.”

“Sir Stephen says the King and his company start for England on the twenty-second. They are to rest a day or two at Osnaburgh, and then press on to the Hague. In ten or twelve days we may count on the old German being safely lodged at St. James’s, and then—and then—for the final stroke of the game !” Monteiro heaved a short, quick sigh. “Sir Stephen had received my last, Robilliard, and so inquired at the place you mentioned for an early opportunity of sending me a letter. At last, Robilliard, at last, the day of reckoning comes !”

“And I do hope, Excellency, you will make the rogue pay the last farthing of the score !”

“All I can, old friend ; but that will not be half enough. Now, tell me, have you seen nothing of Morley ?”

“Not a trace, since the morning of the day Lady Maud was to be carried off ; and what’s more, he paid up that very day !”

“To stop anxious inquiries, no doubt,” re-

marked Monteiro, who was looking at the paper, whereon he was slowly and with evident care tracing some lines.

“The more I think over it, the more I’m convinced that the chap on the grey horse was the man I crossed swords with, over a fortnight ago, at the top of the Hay-market.”

“I can scarce believe it,” said Monteiro, without raising his eyes. “Wherefore do you think so?”

“Because, just as we had gathered at the tavern there, near Hatton Garden, something went wrong with the fastening of his vizard, and, as he was adjusting it, I caught a glimpse of his face; it struck me at the moment that I knew it, and since I have remembered the man—he was Captain Langley!”

“So much the worse,” replied Monteiro, carefully folding up the note he had written; “the worse for our lady of Langdale if he had succeeded, the worse for himself should I ever be able to punish him. Now, D’Arcy, it is almost time you waited on the Countess of Helmsford; she is most desirous of rewarding you for your share in the rescue of her niece.

She is rich, man, and generous—faith ! most generous.”

“I did not seek to save the young lady for the sake of any reward,” returned D’Arcy, making no motion to obey Monteiro’s suggestion ; “but to spite yon villain Langley, and pay him back in some measure for his treacherous murder of as noble a captain as ever man served under, also to save an innocent creature. Why—why, sir, had Langley such hatred to your gallant father ?”

“In truth, I scarcely know,” said Monteiro, resting his folded arms on the table and speaking thoughtfully ; “they had had an interview — what passed thereat I never knew—but I fancy Langley perceived that Mistress Maud would have a protector in my father. Why, my errand to Paris after his death was to carry out his wishes and offer a home with my sister to our young kinswoman. From the time we learned that Lord Langdale was a sufferer for the cause he had so much at heart, my father was eager to knit up the long-severed links of kinship.”

“Ay, he would have been a father to the young lady indeed,” exclaimed Robilliard,

drawing forth a pipe. "Has your Excellency no idea who was the clever dog who nabbed young Langley on his wedding-day?"

"I have," returned Monteiro, leaning back in his chair and speaking with wonderful gravity considering how his eyes laughed; "but I do not mean to betray the secret yet."

D'Arcy looked up quickly at him, but kept silence.

"*Pardieu!*" cried Robilliard, "I trust he will not trouble the young lady; *you* would be a noble husband for her, Excellency!"

"'Tis not for us to speculate on whom it may please her to honour," said Monteiro carelessly. "Tell me, D'Arcy, when you found yourself at the theatre door with these ruffians, why did you not raise an outcry, dismount and rush in, and so save the noble demoiselle some moments of terror, enough to turn her brain?"

"I did think of it," said D'Arcy, "but I knew from their talk that the door-keepers were bought. Then I expected to see your honour, for I gave my messenger time to reach you earlier had he not loitered, and I feared

to disable myself in the minds of my comrades by showing my game too soon ; so while I hesitated, my lady was trapped, and we were off."

"No matter, D'Arcy, she shall know the good service you have done. I warrant ye she will bestow some good berth upon you yet when she comes to her own—grand falconer—or master of the horse down at Langdale, when she will have a merry company to make the old walls ring."

"Ay, sir, and I hope you will be the head of it," said D'Arcy significantly.

Monteiro frowned, sighed slightly, and rising from his seat, cried :

"By Heaven, D'Arcy, you will be late for my lady! Be off, man, or you will meet scant favour."

D'Arcy at this caught up his hat, and nodding to Robilliard stalked into the outer room, followed by Monteiro.

"D'Arcy," he said in a low voice, "take this note. Be careful, either going in or coming out, to see Gomez, and give it to him unseen by any one. Your Spanish is not first-rate, but you know enough to tell the little devil

that it must be given carefully to Mistress Langley. You see, D'Arcy, I am bound to warn her that the King's return is near; and——"

"Of course, of course!" exclaimed D'Arcy, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows; "trust me, the young lady shall have the billet."

With a bow D'Arcy went off; and, after a moment's pause, Monteiro returned to Robilliard with a graver aspect than he wore previously.

"'Tis an honest fellow," said the old man, nodding towards the door, "and brave; has had a rough life, worked hard, lived hard, and hasn't a stiver in his pouch."

"Nevertheless his age must not be poverty-stricken, Robilliard; I must see to that."

"Ay, Excellency; but how will you manage about yourself? Forgive a humble friend if he speaks plain; I have known your childhood, and, *mort de ma vie!* none love you better."

"Thanks, old true heart; speak out without fear."

"Well, you talked of being nigh the bottom

of your treasure-chest, how's that? Your father's son ought to be rich."

"Oh, I can scarcely tell; my sister's dowries were heavy, and quite right too. Then in arranging for my break with the old life, I had much to pay, so as to start the men I left to succeed me fairly. Then I was not—never have been prudent. This plot against John Langley has cost a good round sum; but let it go." He clapped Robilliard's massive shoulder as he spoke. "I'll win—that is, win nearly all I want, checkmate that knave, reinstate my lady cousin, and then—and then—oh, I shall chalk out a career, never doubt it. I have some marketable qualities which princes value, and at any rate I shall fight my way up if a bullet or a sword-thrust does not lay me low; all I want is something to start with, and not to pay too dear for it."

"And you know where to find that," cried Robilliard; "I have not done so badly, and now I rest from my labours. My widowed daughter and her son, a quiet, clever, thrifty fellow, care for the business, which will be theirs; but, my lad—I beg pardon, my son!—

I would I saw you the owner of this fine heritage—'tis lost in a woman's hand ; it will go to feed the gaming-table and the cock-pit. Most likely she will wed some fop who'll waste her substance and ill-treat herself ; women seldom know a good fellow from a bad."

" Well, well, my brave old boy ! what will be, will be. We must not rob the young lady by way of securing her happiness. Have a glass of Xeres, Robilliard. I have some rare stuff," ringing as he spoke.

Robilliard accepted, and for nearly an hour sat enjoying a talk over old times and former scenes, in which he bore by far the larger share. At last, after thoroughly enjoying both the wine and the conversation, Robilliard bade his host adieu. So soon as the door closed upon him the smile faded from Monteiro's face ; he threw himself into a chair and stretched out his feet to the fire.

" After," he thought, " ay, after, there will be the grief and the struggle ; fool, weak fool that I was, to risk the loss of a hopeful uncertainty for this pain. But she was so fair, so helpless, I felt so strongly the right to

comfort and to keep her. If I had still but played the part of the courteous cavalier, I should have stood a far better chance now ; I did not dream she would have shrunk from me as she did ; and yet it seems since revealed to me, how startling and repellent an outburst like mine must have been to a delicate girl whom I had not had a chance to woo. For three long months night and day she has been before *my* eyes as my own, while she had before *hers* some pale phantom of a saintly husband—faith ! most unlike the original. I have been my own rival ; was ever anything more whimsical ! Will she ever hear me or believe in me ? ah, it stung my very soul, that speech of hers, ‘Has that heritage no part in colouring your estimate of me ?’ How can I ever prove my perfect, simple love ? only by leaving her free—quite free ; and yet this is selfish weakness too ! Shall I let her fall into the hands of some fop who will waste her life and fortune, when I know I am worthier, merely for pride’s sake ? then I shall soon be no more than a soldier of fortune. No ! the thought that she suspects my motives will paralyse my brain, my tongue, when we meet. When

will that be? three whole weary days since she bade me so sweetly, so coldly believe ever in her gratitude, and I have not seen her! How those lovely blue eyes can deepen and flash with indignation—why not with love? No, I can never give her up! And Lady Helmsford—she is a splendid creature, but the devil's own hindrance. I wish I could have a glimpse into her heart or mind; if she were sensible now, or generous, I might tell her the whole truth, and what a help she might be."

The ungrateful Juan quite forgot the ardent admiration he professed and felt for the brilliant Countess a few months before, though always aware that it was at best but an ephemeral fancy.

"I will dress and visit Lady Helmsford this evening; perhaps Maud may appear and speak, and smile, and throw some subtle breath of favour to her husband—her husband! God! it's enough to drive a man mad!"

So saying almost aloud, Monteiro rose, pushed back his chair with some violence,

and proceeded to arrange and lock away his papers.

The three days of which Monteiro complained in his thoughts had been spent by Maud in strict retirement, and passed by the Countess rather agreeably than otherwise.

Monteiro had been a frequent visitor, and though he had spoken and inquired rather too much respecting her niece, it was no more than might be expected considering the danger from which he had rescued her. Nevertheless, Lady Helmsford noticed that he was downcast, preoccupied, and more than all, abrupt and variable in his manner to herself. She, however, had reached the stage of infatuation in which each new aspect of the adored one is more fascinating than the last. The theory of losses at play being the cause of his gloom, suggested by Beville, took full possession of her mind. It seemed to account for everything, and the proud Countess of Helmsford revelled in the idea of the relief she could afford him — of the passionate gratitude with which he would repay her by love and admiration. If at

times painful doubts respecting the possibility of her niece being her rival tormented her with a dim uneasiness, she banished them quickly ; for if Monteiro cared for Maud, if he had any tinge of lover-like feeling for the fair girl he had saved, he would certainly have made some effort to see her—some attempt to hold communication with her, and that, the Countess felt sure he had not. On the whole, the horizon of her life looked clear enough, and she would be very kind to poor Maud. It was her inclination—an inclination she felt became her ; Monteiro's look and words of admiration when she graphically described her interview with John Langley thrilled her heart. He had said she was brave and noble as she was beautiful, and, but for the presence of Lord Chedworth, and one or two others of her acquaintance, would probably have expressed himself still more warmly.

In society, Lady Helmsford shone in the reflected lustre of the romantic incident which had just occurred, and which rumour magnified into the most desperate case of attempted abduction and rescue in modern times. John Langley, too, had as yet made no sign. He

no doubt felt it more prudent to reflect before he acted—and Harold's condition hampered him considerably. He was far from idle, however. He besieged all who could push his interest—from Lord Sunderland down—and flattered himself that at the first audience given by the King his case would be urged by powerful friends. If only he could have the irrevocable deed done before the King's return, all would be well; but the matrimonial part of the scheme bristled with insurmountable difficulties. Meantime, under cover of kindly interest, he kept himself in some degree informed of what was going on at Lady Helmsford's by daily polite inquiries for Mistress Maud Langley.

When that young lady's nerves and senses had calmed down after the terror and excitement of her danger and escape, which had been renewed by the scene with her guardian, she felt a different being from the comparatively light-hearted girl who had started with Lady Helmsford, a few evenings back, all delighted anticipation, to witness a play for the first time.

She felt years older. The possibility

suddenly revealed that her father's lands would be restored to her, gave rise to a certain satisfaction, tinged with gravity and tender regret, that the beloved father was not there to enjoy them himself. Perhaps her happiest feelings arose from the hope of being freed from John Langley's clutches—if so joyful a climax could be reached: but the most overpowering and dominant idea was that she had seen face to face and conversed with the man to whom she had given her hand in the old chapel at Langdale—that he had proved in appearance, and apparently in character, the very opposite of all she had imagined.

The sense of the embarrassing marriage bond between them oppressed her. The promise she had given not to reveal Monteiro's real relationship to Dorothy compelled her to brood over it in silence—which was a terrible trial to that faithful but imaginative woman, who had elevated Monteiro into a hero, and was inclined to quarrel with her taciturn meditative mistress for not talking about him. But Maud's meditations were not all painful; a strange, half-fearful sense of pleasure

streaked their gloom. Never before had she heard such words or met such eyes as her kinsman's (Rupert or Monteiro, she scarce knew which to call him). Instinctively she strove to steady and strengthen herself against the bewildering fascination they wrought upon her. She ought not, she told herself, to believe in a love so sudden and un-called for ; what was she that she should call it forth ? Yet—and yet none could merely *act* the part Monteiro had ; there was such convincing truth in his looks and tones. Then he had risked his life for her. Stranger though he was, if he indeed loved her truly, fondly as he said, her love was half won. It was the doubt that steadied her judgment, and made her give some earnest thought to the consideration of the mixed motives which he confessed had actuated him at the outset,—revenge for his father's death, and determination not to allow the family inheritance to pass into John Langley's hands ; still she could not by any effort of reason efface the deep impression his tenderness and ardour had left upon her. The recollection of the strong throbbing of his heart as he held her

against it for a few moments, while lifting her from the carriage, made her own beat painfully fast, and she turned from the disturbing memory with a sort of fear. The most formidable foe, however, to Monteiro's influence over her was his admirer, Mistress Letitia Sparrow. The mutual sufferings of herself and Maud on the night of the adventure had drawn them somewhat towards each other, besides which Maud had always felt a sort of compassionate kindness towards the object of Lady Helmsford's contemptuous patronage.

Mistress Sparrow therefore paid Maud numerous visits, and was never weary of describing her terror and sufferings in the sort of black-hole to which the treacherous Thomas had consigned her, the conversation generally ending by some passages relating to Monteiro, in which, vibrating between her fear of disobeying the Countess, her anxiety to preserve Maud from crossing that imperious dame, and her desire to do no wrong to Monteiro, poor Mistress Letitia contrived to give, as though reluctantly, a very curious and doubtful impression of his relations to Lady Helmsford. This completed the circle

of Maud's distrust. To conceal from the kinswoman who sheltered and protected her, her entanglement with the man who was, or had been, that kinswoman's accepted lover, was an act of treachery from which Maud Langley—faithful and true by nature, as well as training—shrank with horror. Some means she must and would devise to communicate with Monteiro, and implore him to reveal the whole truth to Lady Helmsford. She was lovely, noble, wealthy—why should he not have sought her before the wild scheme of wedding herself, as a temporary expedient, had come into his head? and now, if a shadow of double-dealing disgraced him, he would be utterly unworthy of her, be his tones ever so tender, his eyes ever so ardent. So reflecting, and tormenting herself almost into a fever, Maud sought in vain to find some means of expressing her wishes to her mysterious husband. From faithful Dorothy's aid she was cut off, and the danger and shame attending the attempt (in her eyes) forbade her seeking any other. In the restlessness of this condition, she began many occupations and laid them down again. She had gone into

her bedchamber to seek her embroidery, and returned to the seat by the fire she had just quitted. Her handkerchief lay on a small work-table beside her—she raised it to find her scissors, and, behold ! there lay a small peculiarly-folded note. Maud, with a startled look round to assure herself she was alone, opened it and read :

“ Sweet lady, keep up your heart ! I have good news from Hanover. My friend has already interested the King in your favour : they are on their homeward journey. Courage, patience, silence for a few more days, and, on my honour, you shall be free of all shackles ! Destroy this.

“ Your devoted kinsman and servant,

“ RUPERT.”

Breathlessly, with a beating heart, Maud read this through several times, and then carefully obeyed the injunction at the conclusion. Was it possible that her sore trial was so nearly over ? Rupert, then, was going to be noble and generous. No doubt he was, after all, attached, perhaps engaged, to Lady Helmsford. All therefore would end well ; nevertheless, Maud wept.

While Maud meditated thus in the seclusion of her chamber, the usual movement to and fro pervaded the great mansion. Notes and visitors and the hundred and one purveyors of fashion and finery came and went. The hall porter at Lady Helmsford's had no sinecure place. It was considerably past her ladyship's usual time for going out, her carriage waited at the door, when D'Arcy presented himself.

"I do not think you can see her ladyship," said the porter, shaking his head; "she is even now going forth. But stay a moment! she may notice you in passing."

To while away the time, D'Arcy turned to speak to Gomez, who was loitering about the hall in a sort of undress, fantastic but less magnificent than his evening attire. Soon Lady Helmsford sailed downstairs, in all the glories of a deep-red velvet sacque, and a hat with plumes of black and crimson.

Her eye was attracted by the tall stranger, whose bearing was so out of keeping with his garb.

"Who have we here?" she asked.

"The gentleman says your ladyship ordered him to call."

“Indeed! Your name, sir?” turning full upon him.

“D’Arcy, an it please your ladyship!” he replied, bowing low.

“D’Arcy!” she repeated, with a gracious smile, “I have expected you; come with me!” She turned into the library as she spoke, D’Arcy, a little awed by her grand air, following. “You have been over-long in obeying my summons,” said the Countess, looking sharply into his rugged, weather-beaten face. “Did not Don Monteiro tell you I desired you to call?”

“He did, my lady; but——”

“I wished to thank and reward you for the help you rendered in saving Mistress Langley from the assassins who had seized her.”

“But I wish for no reward, madam. I did my duty, and am proud to have been useful to the young lady.”

“’Tis not what you wish, but what I will,” returned the Countess, touching a bell that lay beside her. “Send Chifferil to me,” she said to the servant who came in answer. “What have you been, sir?—a soldier?”

“A little of everything, madam! I have

fought afloat and ashore. When the Williamites made Ireland too hot, I served in the Irish Brigade, and helped to keep back the Prince of Holstein Beck's Artillery for a while at the famous fight of Blenheim."

"Ha!" cried the Countess; "that is no recommendation here."

"I should have thought it was," returned D'Arcy, with an unmoved front. "The Langdales were ever true to the King over the water."

"I am not a Langley," exclaimed Lady Helmsford; "nor must you talk treason. Whose service are you in now?"

"Don Juan di Monteiro's, my lady, for the present."

"For the present? Do you not then mean to stay with him?"

"He says he will not want me long. He talks of taking service with the English King; and I do not think he wants any followers."

"You have known this gentleman long?"

"I have."

"And his people?"

"I knew his father."

“And what was he?” cried the Countess, unable to resist the temptation to gratify her curiosity.

“As brave and skilful a sailor as ever handled a ship.”

“Yes, yes! but what was his name? What service was he in?—was he a nobleman?”

“What was his name?—the same as his son’s. I was a while in *his* service. I never asked whom he served—he was a real nobleman!” He had answered her questions, yet told her nothing; but the entrance of Chifferil prevented her pursuing the subject. The little secretary bowed low, cleared his throat nervously, and stood waiting orders.

“How did you find out the plot against my niece?” asked Lady Helmsford, not noticing Chifferil.

“I did not, as you might say, find it out, my lady; but I suspected, from the way the fellows talked of fastening the carriage-doors, that the lady was not willing to go—and no pay would have tempted me to carry off a woman against her will. Then I heard her name, and that she was sister, or niece, or something to your ladyship, so I determined

to let my old commander's son know the mischief that was brewing."

"Quite right. You were not exactly in his service then?"

"Certainly not, or I wouldn't have been engaged in such devilry!"

"I suppose Don Monteiro never employed you to carry off any lady?" asked the Countess, with a pleasant smile, but a keen, sharp glance.

"Not against her will, anyhow," returned D'Arcy, with a twinkle in his dark eyes. "He is too much of a gentleman for that."

"Chifferil," exclaimed Lady Helmsford, thinking, perhaps, that this fruitless cross-examination was not very dignified; "you must take this worthy gentleman to your bureau; give him refreshments, and the present I designed for him—no words, sir. The labourer is worthy of his hire; we owe you much. You have, I think, already given the name of the villain who engaged you in this vile plot to my Lord Chedworth, who is directing the inquiries concerning it?"

"I have, madam."

"And it is?" she asked.

“Morley—Samuel Morley. I knew him long ago in Spain.”

“What a motley crew you wanderers are!” said the Countess contemptuously. “Well, sir, I leave you in Chifferil’s hands, and depend on what help you can give us towards tracing these wretches.”

“That your ladyship may; but I doubt they have escaped beyond the sea. They had money.”

“Where could they have found it then, save with the unknown bridegroom?” D’Arcy made no reply to this conjecture; and the Countess, with a bend of her lofty head, bid him a gracious “good-day” and left the room.

“Begad, she’s a great lady entirely!” said D’Arcy, looking after her with much admiration; “and I’ll go bail she combs *your* wig for you sometimes!”

“Combs my wig! my lady the Countess!” exclaimed Chifferil in utter surprise.

D’Arcy laughed a short and somewhat hoarse cacchination, and, laying his hand on Chifferil’s shoulder, said: “Why did you look

away, my reverend signor, and not notice my attempt to greet you ?”

“Because — oh ! because — my good sir, ’twould never do for my lady to know we had knowledge of each other — never — believe me.”

“Aha, Mr. Chifferil ! you are more cautious than wise. Let me tell you that danger met half way is half baffled. If your great dame finds now that we are acquaint, she’ll smell mischief ; but ’tis of no great matter. Ay, man, but she’s wild about my young Captain ; I could see it with half an eye.”

“It does not become us to conjecture respecting my noble mistress’s fancies,” said Chifferil uneasily. “Will you come with me, Master D’Arcy ?”

He led the Irishman across the hall and down a passage to his own den, meeting on their road Mrs. Beville, who dropped a graceful curtsy and shot a curious glance at Chifferil’s tall companion. “I do not like that woman,” said Chifferil as he closed the door ; “she is smooth and subtle, and has my lady’s ear.”

“She is a tidy-looking baggage enough,” quoth D’Arcy, “and has a shrewd eye. How

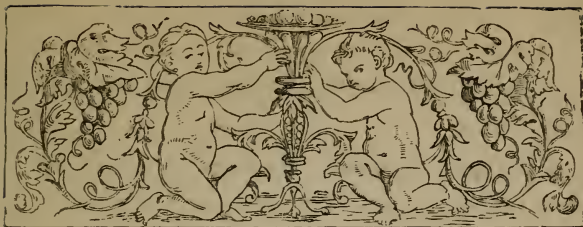
is my client, Mistress Dorothy ? I should like to pay her a visit."

"Pray do not think of such a thing !" cried Chifferil, his bristles ready to stand on end under his wig with fear ; "least said, soonest mended, in this house." And he applied himself to unlock an escritoire, from whence he took a small packet. "Here, my good sir, are seven gold sovereigns which her ladyship charged me to bestow upon you—just to buy some memento of her approbation."

"She's a princess !" said D'Arcy, accepting the coin. "As I have said, I want no guerdon, but I would not offend her ladyship by rejecting her liberality."

"Now for some refreshment," said Chifferil, with a strong effort at a jovial air. He rang, and gave some orders to the servant who answered the summons. Then he and the Irishman sat down to partake of wine and food, during which process the little man made some wonderful attempts to pump his companion, who retaliated with considerable success, the result being that, as D'Arcy took his homeward route to "Lambs'," he grinned and muttered to himself, "My lady the Coun-

tess, indeed, and ten thousand a year to be had for the asking. Begad ! it would be mighty fine ; but he'll never ask her. No ! He'd give her beautiful self, hat and feathers and all, for one smile from that slender colleen, or I don't know what eyes say."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE evening of the same day Mistress Sparrow brought a message from the Countess requesting her niece's company, as Lord Chedworth and one or two others were at dinner, and Lady Helmsford hoped she would not refuse to join them in the drawing-room.

Maud consented more readily than Mistress Letitia expected, and was moreover unusually careful about her dress, which was very simple, a robe of pale gray taffetas and a white muslin sacque adorned with black ribbons; no ornament in her wavy brown hair, but a tuft of early violets in one angle of her square-cut corsage. The negro boy had brought them

to her that afternoon, but did not say whence they came.

Mistress Sparrow had been ordered to accompany Maud—to her great satisfaction ; for though entering it only on sufferance, she never was so happy as when fluttering in what she termed “elegant society.”

It was the first time that Maud had nerved herself to venture out of the privacy of her own apartments since her terrible adventure, and she felt somewhat ashamed of the effort it cost her. She told herself it would not do to grow morbid—that a little more of courage and endurance would clear up many mysteries. For whatever might be Monteiro’s entanglement with her aunt, she felt compelled and disposed to trust him in all matters apart from love.

The Countess and her guests were sipping their coffee in the smallest of the three drawing-rooms, a charming apartment not too large for a sense of comfort. The hangings of amber, the cabinets and furniture of highly-polished walnut inlaid in delicately fine patterns of white, the chairs and sofas covered with amber satin richly embroidered with

many-coloured birds, butterflies, and flowers, china and lacquered ornaments, gave a rich and variegated aspect to the consoles and brackets. To modern eyes there would have seemed a lack of books and periodicals, those circulating mediums of thought, but neither Lady Helmsford nor those with whom she associated missed these dear familiar companions of modern life. Lady Helmsford was standing before the fire, her cup in one hand, talking with a highly-dressed fair little woman whom Maud recognised to be Mistress Ferrars, one of the reigning beauties (a constant companion of the Countess), and a gentleman whom she had not seen before. He was of middle age, and far from handsome, but distinguished and intellectual looking, with evidently prepossessing manners. He was soberly and handsomely attired in brown velvet, laced with gold, and wore a bag-wig and sword. At a little distance, and conversing in a group, stood Lord Chedworth, Sir Eustace Blount, and the clergyman Maud had seen before. Two footmen were collecting the coffee-cups, one held the door open, and directly she entered, Lord Chedworth ad-

vanced to meet our heroine, who observed, with a curious mixture of relief and disappointment, that Monteiro was not present.

“At last fair Mistress Langley deigns to shine forth and gladden the eyes of her admiring friends!” quoth my lord, with his most graceful bow. “I do earnestly hope, madam, you have recovered the *bouleversement* which this lawless attempt must have occasioned you.”

“I thank you, my lord, for all the trouble you have taken concerning it,” returned Maud; “I am now myself again.”

“Come hither, Maud,” called Lady Helmsford from the fireside; Sir Eustace and the parson stood aside, bowing, to let her pass, and Lord Chedworth addressed Mistress Sparrow in a kindly but somewhat jocular tone respecting her imprisonment on the occasion of the late outrage. “Come hither, child,” repeated the Countess; “you know Mistress Ferrars” (Maud executed the profound curtsy which the occasion required). “This is my niece,” continued Lady Helmsford to the gentleman in brown velvet. “Maud, let me present Mr. Craggs to you.”

He bowed low, looking keenly, yet kindly, into the fair young face before him, while she regarded him with some interest, having heard of him from her aunt as the friend of the celebrated Mr. Pope of Twickenham, and one whose position as Secretary of State might possibly enable him to befriend her. James Craggs was a man of some note at that time; a shrewd politician, a fluent speaker, a capable man of business, fond of literature, he had been appointed Secretary on the retirement of Addison.

“We have to congratulate the young lady,” said Craggs in a kindly, fatherly manner, “on her escape. As your ladyship was saying, the very attempt shows that there is a tolerably wide-spread belief in the existence of the missing pardon. I have, by the request of my Lords Sunderland and Berkeley, caused careful search to be made for it, but in vain. I have also inquired of my predecessor, Mr. Addison, if his memory can afford any assistance, but he remembers nothing.”

“Oh, it was before his time!” said Lady Helmsford. “It must have been just before the late Queen’s death that it was

granted, and we all know what confusion ensued."

"Pray, Mistress Langley," lisped Mistress Ferrars, "were you not sorely frightened when the wretches shut you in the coach?"

"So frightened, madam, that I can scarce support the memory of it."

"No!" interposed the Countess. "The mention of it drives the blood from her cheeks; let us talk of something else. Pray, Mr. Craggs, have you any news from Paris? 'tis some days since I had letters."

"There is nothing of much consequence, madam, save that Law's Bank has been declared 'Royal.' The shares, they say, have gone up to twenty-fold the original value!"

"La, sir, you do not say so!" cried Mistress Ferrars. "Why, that goes beyond *our* famous scheme! Do you know, dear Lady Helmsford, I have pledged my diamond necklace to add a few more shares to those I have already bought. Has your ladyship invested largely?"

"No!" said the Countess; "I have never been so much tempted as others. The words of a curious, witty, cynical little Frenchman I

knew last year in Paris, have ever since been present to me—Monsieur d’Espine—has your reverence ever met him? for I know you have frequented the best company in that charming capital, when you travelled with my Lord Dormer,” continued Lady Helmsford, addressing the clergyman.

“No, madam, but I think I have heard of him.”

“Well, he used to take a pinch of snuff whenever Law and the Mississippi Company were mentioned, and quote the King of Sardinia, who told Law he was not powerful enough to ruin himself.”

“Nevertheless, madam,” returned Mr. Craggs, “many powerful intellects have looked carefully into our South Sea scheme, and perceived no flaws.”

“True, sir; but my little sage used to say further, that one day people would want to turn their paper into gold, and then would be the beginning of sorrows.”

“Cynics and sages seldom have much to invest,” said the clergyman.

“Moreover, they would lose their character if they were to run after filthy lucre, like us

of the common unintellectual rabble!" added Lord Chedworth.

"Fie! fie! to speak of yourself by such naughty words," cried Mistress Ferrars.

"And what news of the King?" asked Sir Eustace.

"Oh! his Majesty is on his homeward way," replied Craggs. "They are busy dusting and whitewashing at St. James's. It is supposed, if the winds be not unfavourable, he may land to-morrow week."

Maud's heart beat quick as she listened. Monteiro's note had taught her to look to the King's arrival for the solution of her difficulties—liberation from the Langleys, and freedom of action on her own part; but her nerves quivered as she looked at her aunt, so gracious and smiling—quivered with shame and pain, as she thought of the deceit practised on her.

Meantime, Craggs was still speaking. "All the world seems unusually anxious for his Majesty's return. My lady the Countess here, and Lord Sunderland, and John Langley—you know Langley of the Admiralty?" (to Lord Chedworth); "he has wearied us with inquiries."

“Ay, and Captain Harold his son—” began Sir Eustace, and then checked himself. “He is sick, I find—ill of fever; but the curiosity of the illness is, that first his man told me he had broke his arm, and next day denied it and swore I must have been mistaken, that he could never have so said. I went again, like a true brother-in-arms, to inquire for my comrade, and lo! his cruel parent had carried him off to his dreary mansion in Great Queen Street! Rather extraordinary treatment for a fever.”

“Heavens! Sir Eustace,” cried Mrs. Ferrars, “are you not speaking somewhat recklessly before Mistress Langley?”

“If so, I ask a thousand pardons.”

“Nay, sir, I already know of my cousin’s indisposition,” said Maud very calmly.

“Sparrow,” called Lady Helmsford, “tell them to fetch the card-table. Come hither, Sir Eustace; I would speak with you;” and she drew the young baronet aside to question him about Harold’s condition.

“I presume so young and fair a lady as yourself does not care for cards,” said the parson to Maud.

“Nay, sir, I do not see why youth and beauty should incapacitate the owner for the pleasures of play !” exclaimed Mistress Ferrars jealously ; she was an ingrained gambler.

“Nay, indeed,” echoed the polite viscount ; “I should rather say there is a degree of intellectual attraction in gaming which both these fair ladies would be quick to feel.”

Mistress Ferrars tapped him approvingly with her fan.

“In truth,” said Maud, smiling, “I fear I am too dull to appreciate the attraction his lordship speaks of.”

“Mistress Langley loves reading and music best,” said Mistress Letitia, with a complimentary smirk ; “’tis ravishing to hear her touch the harpsichord.”

“Indeed !” cried Lord Chedworth and Mr. Craggs together ; “let us petition for a few strains,” added the latter.

“Come,” said Lady Helmsford, returning from her short conference with Sir Eustace ; “who will play quadrille ?” and she took up one of the packs of cards laid on the table that had just been set out, and began to shuffle them, throwing out the fours, tens,

and eights, in preparation for her favourite game. "What is it, Maud?" she continued, observing the gentlemen were asking her something.

"Only that we petition Mistress Langley to charm us with a *sonata* or an *aria*," said Mistress Letitia.

"Go, play something, child," said the Countess kindly; "you have some skill. The harpsichord is in the next room, you will not disturb us; go, Sparrow, open it, and see that the fire is good. Mistress Ferrars, we will take Mr. Craggs and the parson for our partners; when my lord and Sir Eustace have had their ears sufficiently tickled they may cut in."

"Suffer me to lead you to the music-room," said Lord Chedworth, taking Maud's hand with ceremonious respect, and, followed by Sir Eustace, he conducted her to the harpsichord.

Maud did not dream of refusing; she was, indeed, too much taken up with her fast increasing fears lest Monteiro would not come, to feel any nervousness about playing. She had made up her mind (for she feared to

employ any secondary medium of communication between them) to slip a little note, requesting him to contrive an interview, into his hand herself. What a strong effort of will over pride and the shyness induced by her peculiar relationship to this new-found kinsman such a step entailed, can hardly be described; nothing short of her eager desire to act faithfully towards her aunt could have strengthened her to take it; and now, perhaps the opportunity she had sought would be lost. However, though a little silent and tremulous, she contrived to present a composed aspect, and sat down to the harpsichord with a sense of being rescued from talk and questions.

The instrument was so placed that, sitting at it, she could not see the door; which, when she was more than half way through a delicate *sonata* of Beethoven's, was opened by a footman, who, not seeing his mistress among the listeners, was about to lead Monteiro, who followed him into the next room, but the new guest touched his arm.

"Do not disturb the music," he said; "I will introduce myself when it is over."

The man retired ; and Monteiro, with a silent bow to Mistress Sparrow and Lord Chedworth, stood a little apart listening in deep thought or attention.

When Maud had touched the last chord lingeringly, she sat still for a moment, hearing, though not heeding, Lord Chedworth's compliments on her skill, her taste, the additional magic which such accomplishments bestowed even on beauty and grace. Then Monteiro's voice, answering some question of Mistress Sparrow's, struck her ear.

"Your gallant champion is here," said my lord, and Maud, subduing by a strong effort a quivering of the nerves and a decided inclination to run away, turned and met his eyes for the first time since that eventful night.

Monteiro, who wore a rich suit of dark maroon brocade with chased gold knee and shoe buckles, did not attempt to approach her ; he merely bowed low in acknowledgment of her salute. Both Sir Eustace Blount and Lord Chedworth now besought Mistress Langley to delight them again. She, hesitating, feeling that once Monteiro had passed

into the next room her opportunity would be gone, turned to the harpsichord and touched a few notes, then rising, exclaimed :

“ I can remember no more without music. There is some in that stand, is there not ? ”

Lord Chedworth and Sir Eustace flew to place it before her, then forcing herself to address him she said, “ Monsieur di Monteiro, I trust your arm is no longer painful ? ”

He started to her side.

“ No, dear madam, ’tis almost well.” Their eyes met, even through his bronzed skin the rising colour showed in Monteiro’s cheek. “ And you,” he said, “ are you quite your own calm self again ? ”

“ Scarcely,” returned Maud, with a slight, irrepressible, but conscious smile ; “ I feel as though I should never dare to cross the threshold again.”

“ I trust such discomfort will ere long be removed,” said Monteiro significantly.

Here Lord Chedworth laid some music, both printed and manuscript, before her.

“ There is a choice, where I hope you may find something familiar,” he observed.

“I did not know you were a musician,” said Monteiro. “Do you not also sing?”

“Only when alone.”

“Perhaps,” he almost whispered, “I may one day be so blest as to hear you.”

Maud understood him, and nearly faltered in her purpose; but she was improving in self-control, so she looked gravely and steadily at him.

“I used only to sing for my father,” she said, bending to look at the music which lay on the harpsichord. She began to turn it over with one hand, while with the other she affected to rearrange her bouquet of violets, but really drew forth the note which had cost her so much resolution to write.

Sir Eustace was, at that moment, occupied by an examination of the beauties of Mab and Tab, who, when Lady Helmsford received in the present unceremonious manner, were generally of the company. While Lord Chedworth, though naturally jealous of the distinguished-looking Spaniard, was too well-bred to interrupt a conversation in which he had no part, stood back for a moment, waiting Mistress Langley’s selection from the music.

“Do you know anything of music, Monsieur di Monteiro?” she asked, her heart beating, and hardly able to articulate the words; as, glancing at those who were near, yet not too near, she caught the watched-for opportunity, and suddenly placed a little twisted billet upon the sheet before them.

“My knowledge is less than my love,” replied Monteiro, instantly covering it with his hand, and almost as quickly half-turning towards the company, put it in his bosom, thrusting his hand within his waistcoat with an easy natural gesture, and letting it rest there a few minutes.

“I know none of these,” cried Maud, while she turned pale and dizzy with horror at her own daring. “I will try and play from memory.”

She sat down and tried to recall a “minuet” but her touch was uncertain, and she soon broke down.

“Can you forgive my so soon marring the melody?” she cried to Lord Chedworth, who immediately replied in his usual strain of polished compliment; under cover of which Monteiro said softly :

“You try yourself too much;” and then walked away into the next room.

“Ah, Don Juan!” cried Lady Helmsford, “have you been here long?”

“Only a few moments, madam; time enough to hear some sweet strains which I would not permit your servant to disturb by announcing me.”

“Ah! I trust you bring me good luck, Monteiro?” said the Countess; “I have had rare ill-fortune to-night.”

“Indeed, belle Comtesse, I am not like to mend it; I have lost heavily in my own game of late;” burning to read Maud’s note, and thinking of the sad, grave, warning look she had cast upon him, Monteiro sighed—a slight, short sigh. It caught Lady Helmsford’s quick ear, however; she turned her great lustrous bold eyes to her “favoured guest” with a wonderfully soft expression.

“How is that, sir? I must scold you for your recklessness in venturing to play with the merciless gamesters of this wicked city.”

Monteiro made no reply; and, thus con-

firmed in her hopes and suspicions, the Countess applied herself to her cards till the game, which had been almost played out when Monteiro came in, was ended.

“Have you spoken to Maud?” asked Lady Helmsford; “she is scarce herself yet, poor child.”

“Pray,” asked Craggs, “is this the gentleman who was so fortunate as to rescue Mistress Langley?”

“It is; let me present Don Juan di Monteiro to Mr. Secretary Craggs.”

The gentlemen bowed.

“Pray, sir,” said the latter, “are you lately from Spain?”

“No, sir, I came last from France.”

“’Tis not your first visit to England, from your command of our tongue?”

“It is not, sir; but I am half English, and part of my errand here is to request admission into the English service.”

“Indeed; I am sure the service of so distinguished a gentleman ought to be welcome.”

“If I understand him aright,” said the parson, “I heard Don Juan state his wish to

become English through the medium of a fair English wife."

"The most agreeable method," returned Monteiro, laughing.

"Madam," said Mr. Craggs to the Countess; "I must wish your ladyship good-night."

"What! so soon, Mr. Secretary?"

"Yes, madam; I am bound to show myself at Lady Sunderland's rout. Indeed, I had hoped to escort your ladyship thither. Don Monteiro, adieu! Should matters unfortunately culminate in warfare betwixt us and Spain, dare we count upon you?"

"Sir, I prefer England to all other lands, and, if permitted to adopt her service, she will find no truer son than myself."

"That's frank at any rate. My Lady Helmsford, sweet Mistress Ferrars, gentlemen, good-night."

Mr. Secretary Craggs bowed himself away, stopping to say a few kindly words to Maud as he passed out.

"Tell me, my dear Countess," cried Mistress Ferrars, "are you going to the great sale in Soho Square to-morrow? Lady Betty Conyers',

you know ? she is quite bankrupt, and everything goes to the hammer."

"Indeed ! I had forgotten," returned the Countess carelessly.

"Oh ! there will be the greatest rarities—pictures and lace ; you know her point was divine. Then the china, second only to my Lord Chedworth's ; do come, dear Lady Helmsford, we are sure to find monstrous bargains."

"I dare say I shall look in ; what is the time appointed ?"

"At noon it commences ; be sure you are early !"

"I am told these auctions are among the sights of London !" observed Monteiro, who was leaning on the back of Lady Helmsford's chair. "I should like, as the French say, to assist at one."

"Then come with me to-morrow," said the Countess.

"You are ever best as well as fairest," exclaimed Monteiro in the conventional tone of compliment. "I shall willingly attend you, but I am engaged in the first part of the forenoon."

“I can await you,” said Lady Helmsford, opening and shutting her fan, while she seemed to examine its pattern.

“La, sir ! you are indeed honoured,” cried Mistress Ferrars.

“But, madam,” returned Monteiro, with a low bow, “I could not reconcile myself to keep a lady, and *such* a lady, waiting—I should lose my head, mismanage my business, and hurry through my appointment ; permit me to wait upon you at this scene of traffic to-morrow, between twelve and one ; will this meet your approval ?”

“Yes, let the arrangement stand,” said the Countess shortly.

“And now, dear madam, shall we resume our play ?” said Mistress Ferrars, fingering the cards with some impatience.

“Certainly,” returned the hostess ; “but if you do not object, let my good Mistress Sparrow play for me ; she will enormously enjoy it, and I will pay her stakes ?”

Mistress Ferrars made a little grimace. “As you like, she will hardly play so good a game as you do ! ask Sir Eustace to come and be my partner.”

"Wherefore, madam, reject me?" asked the chaplain.

"La, sir," returned the beauty insolently, "it is but natural the parson should be partner with the *dame de compagnie*."

Sir Eustace obeyed the summons readily; he was weary of a *tête-à-tête* with Letitia, to which Lord Chedworth's devotion to Maud had reduced him.

All were now assembled in the yellow drawing-room. Maud glad to listen to Lord Chedworth, who, with the tact of a kind heart, which really underlay his artificial manner, led the conversation far afield, in compassion for the fair girl whose nerves had evidently not yet recovered the cruel shock they had sustained. While on a settee, at some distance from the rest, Lady Helmsford sat, leaning back with a slightly fatigued air, in deep conversation with Monteiro, who, resting one knee on a *prie-dieu* chair in front of her, had placed his folded arms on the top, and occasionally stole a glance at Maud and Lord Chedworth, who were conversing so amiably by the fire.

"Yes, they get on very well," said Lady

Helmsford, following the look and answering it. "My lord is monstrously pleasant, quite young of his years. I think I could like him myself, only you see he is bespoke. He is delicate too, and is not over-eager to urge his suit—the best way to win a proud shy girl like Maud!"

"Is it? is it?" said Monteiro impatiently. "'Tis a style of wooing suited to the calm temperament of age! If *I* ever wooed, I fear I would err in another direction!"

"If you *ever* wooed," laughed Lady Helmsford. "Would you persuade *me*, Juan, that you are a saint or an anchorite?"

"Heaven knows I have been neither!" he returned, smiling; "but at any rate I strive to be honest!"

"Ah! dear friend," said Lady Helmsford lightly, "you and your wooing would never suit her, nor she you; she is so cold and colourless, the very stuff from which to form an immaculate great lady; but come, Monteiro, you really do not give me the confidence our friendship warrants. Who are you, mysteriousman?"

"You shall know, dear lady, before any one, but not yet."

“Well, Juan! I trust you; but tell me, you have been gloomy, you have looked worn, depressed. Have you lost heavily?”

“Heavily. I scarce know how much; but of this too you must not speak to me till I can tell you all; there is no use in questioning I will not reply.” He spoke with a certain resolution, none the less firm because it was playful.

“But,” he continued, “what you have told me of Harold Langley, confirms suspicions I before had. I must speak to Blount. Could this attempt be traced home to Mistress Langley’s own guardian, what a weapon to your hand!”

After some more talk the card-players rose, and the party gathered round a tray of wine and macaroons.

Monteiro, with the tact peculiar to himself, contrived a few words with Maud while Lady Helmsford attended to her guests. “I have read your note; I will find the opportunity soon. Maud! have you forgiven me for my ungoverned outburst? do you believe in me?”

“Ah! Monsieur di Monteiro! I know not what to believe. I want most of all that you

should grant the request I shall make when we meet."

"'Tis unlikely I shall refuse, unless it is something hurtful to yourself. You are going? and I dare not even kiss your hand?"

"*De grace*, Monsieur di Monteiro! spare me these words!"

"What! are you about to retire, Maud?" said the Countess, coming towards them. "Lord Chedworth, Mistress Langley wishes you good-night."

The chivalrous nobleman approached, took the hand she offered, and raised it with an air of devotion to his lips. Maud smiled graciously upon him, and Monteiro made a quick step towards them, stopped himself, and turned away to address Sir Eustace. The Countess, strange to relate, missed seeing this expressive movement; Mistress Ferrars at that moment was making her *adieux*.



CHAPTER IX.

THE note which Maud Langley had found so difficult to compose was a source of mixed pain and pleasure to its recipient, in which the former largely predominated. He read it over and over again, although its simplicity and brevity rendered the meaning clear.

“Sir,” it ran, “I do beseech you contrive to speak with me alone. I have somewhat of importance to say.—Yours gratefully, M. L.”

She was in some perplexity, and she trusted him enough to make an advance which he could see cost her an effort. Well, he would prove worthy of it by trying for the present.

to renounce the lover's tone, to leave her quite free, though a few days more would put a fresh barrier between them. She would turn a new page in her young life, and find herself hedged round with the dignity of rank and wealth; while the first chapter of *his* would close, not indeed with defeat, but with fortune's gifts exhausted, and new ones to be extorted from the future.

The tone of the note was utterly cold; but that was to be expected, considering their peculiar relations. It was the "Yours gratefully" to which he specially objected. She must not imagine herself bound to him by any gratitude: he wanted her free unbought affection; nor did he feel himself unworthy of it. True, his complications with the Countess would be hard to explain to a young girl with a high unattainable standard before her mind; but with Monteiro himself they had not a feather weight. From the hour he had with passionate chivalry vowed himself to his unconscious bride, the beautiful Lady Helmsford had been nothing, and less than nothing, to him—only so far as she might be useful to her niece; and Monteiro, or Rupert Langley,

chafed angrily at the species of double-dealing into which he found himself almost unavoidably driven in consequence of his former equivocal acquaintance with the Countess.

At present, however, all considerations were merged in the absorbing question, how to carry out Maud's welcome injunction to see her alone. He had at all events prepared the way to do so by the appointment to meet her ladyship at the auction—an appointment he intended to keep, for he knew Lady Helmsford would wait for him. Why could he not avow all, and rid himself of this cursed necessity for feigning? But he dared not! He could not blind himself to her passionate fondness. He felt she was a woman capable of generosity, but also of cruel pitiless revenge; and which mood would sway the noble lady when she found her niece was her rival—her successful rival—was a doubtful and a very serious question, while the means of vengeance lay ready to her hands, in John Langley and his son. Would that Maud had listened to him, and converted their temporary and scarcely legal marriage into a real one; she would then indeed have been safe! But now

that he calmly thought over that stormy yet tenderly remembered interview, he could not wonder at her refusal. If there was any woman of rank and reputation under whose care he could place her until, as a wealthy minor, the Chancellor would be her guardian, he could then afford to be more candid with Lady Helmsford—but he knew none.

“The upshot of all the doubts and difficulties,” he thought, with much bitterness, as he rang for Victor to take away his scarcely-eaten breakfast, “will be that I shall lose her. Everything is against me—her entanglement in this maddening sort of marriage with me, which makes her more unapproachable than even marriage with another—the irrepressible avowal with which, fool that I was, I frightened her here in this room—her very gratitude, of which I cannot and would not avail myself. There are wild impulses that sometimes almost impel me to a forcible assertion of my rights, by running away with her, like the other ruffian! but it would be a brace of ruffians then, indeed! God forbid I should ever attempt to grasp such a delicate flower so rudely; she is

different from all other women I have had anything to say to.—Well, Victor! What news?”

“The brave D’Arcy is below, and wishes to speak with your Excellency.”

“Send him up—and how goes the time, Victor?”

“’Tis eleven struck.”

“What! have I been meditating here over an hour? Give me my writing-materials.”

Victor obeyed, and left the room.

A tap at the door soon announced D’Arcy.

“Whence come you?” asked Monteiro, without looking up from his writing.

“From going to and fro, your honour,” replied the old soldier, with a grim smile. “I spent a mighty agreeable evening at Lambs’ last night.”

“I hope you kept sober,” said Monteiro, looking up quickly.

“I did so, sir; though I was bound to drink my lady the Countess’s health; a fine beautiful woman as ever I looked on!—faith! a king wouldn’t be too good for her—rich and generous——”

“There, there! I don’t want to hear your

admiration of Lady Helmsford. Who were you drinking with at Lambs'?"

"Some fellows I met long ago in Germany, and one of them let out he had seen Morley—or, as he called him, Strange—in a wild country sort of place, away north of Brook-green, and that he was sick because of a cut in his head. So I thought I would ride round that way this morning and have a look: Robilliard found me a horse."

"Well, what did you see?" asked Monteiro, laying down his pen.

"I did not see Morley, or Strange, but I saw one of the postillions, the one that rode the leader *that* night. I knew him at once: the postillions you see had no masks, but I had, so he did not know me.

"Whereabouts is this place?" said Monteiro, with interest.

"I can scarce describe it to you, sir, for you don't know the country round London, but I could lead you there. I went around Chelsea way—by Buckingham House, North End, and Hammersmith—but I think 'twould be shorter to go by the Uxbridge Road. There is an open stretch of common up to a hamlet called North

Highway. Midway between it and Brookgreen I came upon a curious tumble-down red brick house, with big stables beside it, broken fencing—windows stopped up—cut-throat sort of place—a few fir trees and stunted oaks about it ; still there was a cheerful smoke out of one of the chimneys, and some cocks and hens scratching and clucking round by the side of the house—so I pulled up and rode very slow. By the near end of the stables a man with his leg bandaged, and a big stick in his hand, was leaning against a piece of paling. I knew him in a minute ; so, keeping off a bit, I asked if I could get to Harrow that road. He said he did not know, and went on to curse the place up and down for a melancholy ghostly hole, that no one would stay in if he were not tied by the leg. After a little more talk I asked who lived there, and he said an old care-taker and his wife ; but when I asked to whom it belonged, he pulled up all of a sudden, and says he, ‘ What’s that to you ? I’ve been talking too much,’ and away he stumped round to the back of the place.”

“ This is a curious incident, D’Arcy : are you sure of your man ? ”

“Cock sure, Excellency ! and my notion is that he has been hidden away till he is forgotten, and the broken bones you gave him are all right again. Moreover, I feel pretty sure this is the place Mistress Maud Langley was to have been taken to. You see the hunt after her would be more likely to have been along the high-road, and from Chelsea it’s all cross cuts to the Scrubs, where I saw the postillion.”

“I wish,” said Monteiro after this long description of his discoveries by D’Arcy—“I wish we could trace the ownership of this house to John Langley ; but I fear he is too shrewd not to obliterate his tracks. D’Arcy, I have much on hands to-day ; look to this matter for me. Here,” opening his purse and giving him some money ; “don’t spare the filthy necessary lucre. I must go out now. Call me a coach, old comrade.”

Having watched the Countess of Helmsford’s gilded equipage turn into Soho Square, Monteiro bade his driver go as fast as the condition of his cattle would permit, to St. James’s ; dismissing the conveyance, he knocked at the door.

“Her ladyship is not long gone out,” was the porter’s reply to his queries.

“Ha !” returned Monteiro, and stood a moment as if in thought. “Can I see Mr. Chifferil ?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. James, summon Mr. Chifferil.”

“If he is in his own room,” said Monteiro, who knew it, “I will visit him there.”

The footman accordingly led Monteiro across the hall, and down a passage, throwing open the door into Chifferil’s office or study, whichever it may be called.

The little man seemed worn and ill, and looked up with an air of great astonishment at his visitor.

“Chifferil,” cried Monteiro, his eyes sparkling with impatience, as he threw aside his feathered hat and grasped the secretary’s hand, “there are two doors to this room, whither leads that one ?” pointing opposite.

“To another passage, and the common stair,” said Chifferil, with increasing surprise.

“Go then,” Monteiro exclaimed with vehemence, and pushing the little man by the shoulder—“go straight to Mistress Langley, tell her I await her here ; bring her with you

as privately as you can. Where are those cursed hags, Beville and Dorothy ?”

“ Mistress Beville is gone forth on an errand for my lady ; of the other I know naught.”

“ In luck for once !” said Monteiro. “ Go, man ! do not lose a second.”

“ But, sir, good sir ! Mistress Langley will not come, and I durst not, I fear—”

“ Look you, Chifferil, I will give you another fear to correct the first. By Heaven ! if you don’t instantly obey, I’ll thrust my rapier through you !” and he laid his hand on the hilt.

“ Goodness preserve me ! he is gone mad,” said the terrified secretary, rushing to the opposite door.

“ No, no, good Chifferil ! Mistress Maud expects me ; ’tis a matter of the last importance—go !”

And Chifferil, partly from fear, but more from complaisance, hastened upstairs to Maud’s apartments.

As soon as he was gone, Monteiro carefully locked the door by which he had himself entered, and then took his stand by the table,

his eyes fixed upon the opposite entrance. He had not long to wait ; it opened, and his face lit up with the joy her presence brought. She was followed by Chifferil, his face blank with amazement, for Mistress Langley, so far from refusing to see the bold Spaniard, had immediately accompanied, or rather preceded him at a pace he could scarce keep up with.

“ Stay without yon door !” said Monteiro peremptorily : “ see that no one comes in ! and keep your watch in your hand ; in half an hour, sharp time, enter and tell me I must be gone.” Something in his eye and tone made Chifferil obey without a word.

“ Dios ! I am forced to limit my own glimpse of heaven !” he exclaimed, as the door closed on the stupefied secretary. “ Now, madam ! beloved ! Maud ! speak ! I can but snatch a moment to obey you ; speak !”

But Maud, paralysed for a moment by the suddenness and boldness of Monteiro’s stratagem, could not find words ; she clasped her hands, pressing them on her heart, and gazed straight into Monteiro’s eyes with a look so earnest, so imploring, that he had less difficulty in keeping his resolution to drop the

lover. "Sir! my cousin," she said at last, with an evident effort; "the prayer I wished to urge upon you, is that I may acquaint the Countess who you are, and wherefore you took Harold's place in that ceremony. Indeed I cannot bear to live thus deceiving her from day to day; pray, sir, release me from my promise!"

"Yes! the deceit is odious," said Monteiro, looking down. "Yet, Maud, I tremble for *you* if the truth be known; a little more patience, and all may with safety be told."

"But not the less will my aunt justly complain if I do not confide in her. Why—why do you fear *her*?"

"I—" He hesitated. It was impossible to explain his reasons, even had he time. "My moments now are too few for explanation," he continued. "I can but ask you to trust me yet. Maud, dearest! to whom I have vowed my faith, whether you accept it or not, trust me yet."

"I do, I must in much," she said. "But in this I do entreat you be guided by me; no danger can come that will outweigh the wrong of keeping this matter from Lady

Helmsford ; let me speak to her this day, when she comes in ; I utterly dread telling her ; why, I know not, yet I will——”

“Not so,” returned Monteiro after a moment’s thought. “The task must be mine, sweet cousin, as I may call you nothing else ; your desire shall be fulfilled. Give me two days, and the Countess shall know I am your husband.”

“Rupert,” she said very softly, great tears standing in her eyes, “I believe that, besides my good Dorothy, I have no friend in the wide world save yourself ; do not jest about the strange stratagem by which you preserved me from my terrible uncle and his son. I thank you for it, but do not speak of it now.”

“I will not ; indeed I will not,” he exclaimed, touched by the simple dignity of her manner. “But as a kinsman and a friend, suffer me to put one question, and answer it. You are young, but not too young to have met some one you thought worthy your love ; is it so ?”

“Nay. Had I loved any other, how could I have consented to wed Harold ?”

“Then,” cried Monteiro unconsciously drawing nearer to her, “your heart is all your own !”

“It is indeed,” returned Maud, with a smile. “To whom could I have given it ?”

“I breathe once more,” murmured Monteiro. “Speak to me again, sweet cousin ! call me Rupert ! tell me you feel I am your friend. Ay ! utterly yours—in what character you will ! speak to me.”

“Rupert ! be sure you do not make my aunt unhappy ;” she looked down as she spoke.

“Her happiness is not in my keeping ; I swear I never sought to be its guardian,” said Monteiro emphatically. “Tell me you believe me.”

“Your voice sounds truthful,” she returned, with a sigh.

“Then promise you will leave this matter in my hands ; do not attempt to broach it yourself.”

“I promise,” said Maud, raising her eyes and letting them rest on his earnestly.

“Believe me I am true,” he began ; then with a sudden change of manner he exclaimed : “Ah ! turn away your eyes, sweet

one ! if you look thus, I shall forget my vows. Maud ! had we met when your good father lived, and had I had time and opportunity to woo you, would you have shrunk from me as you do ? Remember, fairest, dearest cousin, that for months you have been before me, day and night, as my own, my wife ! Oh ! pardon me—I did not mean to speak in this strain ; but you surely must feel how great, how irresistible, was the temptation to confess all, when we were alone for the first time, and the burning wish——”

“ Ah ! do not—do not speak such words, my friend, my cousin ! I cannot describe how they disturb and alarm me ; my heart beats as though it would burst, and I have so little peace !”

“ Forgive me,” said Monteiro penitently, his superior experience deriving a little comfort from this confession of disturbance ; “ I will not again transgress.”

“ And you will certainly tell my aunt ?”

“ Upon my honour, yes !”

“ Will you inform me when it is done ?”

“ I imagine my lady will not lose much time in letting you know,” said Monteiro, with a

smile which Maud did not find reassuring.

"Then I will say good-bye," returned Maud.
"Your promise has relieved my heart."

"Oh, not yet! not yet!" he exclaimed.
"Stay a little longer; it will be days before I can see you again. One more warning, sweetest cousin!—let nothing induce you to take action against me—against the gossamer bonds that unite us. I speak now solely in your own interest. Oh! trust me, when the right time comes you shall be free!"

"But my aunt says," returned Maud, her composure much restored by his frankness, "that at the outset the ceremony was illegal because you must have used Harold's name."

"No, faith!" cried Monteiro, laughing. "My words were, 'I, Rupert, take thee, Maud.' The strange parson knew not what the bridegroom's name might be, and you were too faint—Ah! I must not think of that day! But you promise this much?"

"I do, sir—cousin—you see I trust you. Strange," continued Maud, looking at him but speaking to herself—"strange though it be, I

seem to catch glimpses of my father in your look and voice — yet you are not like him !”

“ Was it this fancy then kept you mute when you saw Harold was not beside you *that* day ?”

“ Partly ; but more because I feared they would hurt you.”

“ Dearest ! beloved !—I mean, dear madam — your goodness makes my heart ache. What ! must you leave me ? But, Maud, will you not be in the drawing-room to-night—to-morrow ? I can come when I like, and I can at least see you !”

“ No, sir ! I will not see you again till Lady Helmsford knows——” She paused.

“ That my whole soul is yours !” cried Monteiro. “ This is the real confession ! That empty, distracting ceremony counts for nothing. But oh ! should John Langley, or any one molest you, will you not take courage and trust yourself to me ?”

He clasped the hand she held out in adieu, as he spoke, and covered it with passionate kisses.

“ Rupert—my friend—my cousin,” cried

Maud, struggling to withdraw it; "is this your promise?"

"I know I break it," said Monteiro, still grasping her hand; "but you must forgive! You do not know the despair for my own future that mingles with my hope for yours. Yet I am not, I will not be, selfish or unworthy of you. There, I will not keep you against your will—go, dearest!"

"Rupert!" exclaimed Maud, much moved, "you are very, very good to me! May God protect you!" She burst into tears, and turning quickly, opened the door, ran lightly past the wretched Chifferil, and away up to her own room.

"The half hour was not quite expired," said Chifferil, much relieved as he entered the room. He found Monteiro had thrown himself into a chair, and, resting his elbows on the table, had buried his face in his hands. "Eh, sir, I hope there is no new misfortune!—nothing fresh?"

Monteiro did not reply at once, and first rose, stretching out his arms as if to grasp something invisible to his companion. "Another week, and all may be lost to me! If I succeed

for her, I perhaps destroy myself; but if I fail—if through some royal crotchet she is condemned to poverty and dependence—no power on earth shall keep her from me! Chifferil, my good friend, I was somewhat rough just now; forgive it! The strain of these last scenes in the drama we are enacting is somewhat trying.”

“Indeed, sir, I was in mortal fear while I stood yonder, besides which a bitter draught from one of the lower doors caught me about the calves,” rubbing the part affected. “I trust you did not offend Mistress Langley! Methought she wept as she came past me.”

“Offend her! Heaven forbid! Chifferil, you shall soon hail her Baroness Langdale, and free from all claimants, with the world before her where to choose!”

“What, sir! free of that impostor who calls himself her husband?”

“Ay! even of him. Now, good-morrow, Chifferil.”

“Stay, sir! I beseech you tell me what account shall I give of your visit to my mistress!”

“—————!” said Monteiro to himself.

"'Tis indeed time this were ended—say——" (looking around) "oh, say I came in to see this morning's *Courant*, which my stupid fellow forgot to give me—here, let me look." He hastily seized it. "*Caramba !*" he exclaimed after a minute's silence, "that is good ! an express from Helvoetsluys. The King and his company arrived there on Monday, and, after a day's rest, will set sail for Dover should the wind be favourable. The toils are closing round John Langley."

"Well, good-day, sir. I think no eye saw Mistress Maud's descent."

"Keep counsel a short space longer, Chif-feril, and hurrah for broad daylight !"

So saying, Monteiro threw on his hat and left the house. He was not much behind time at the auction after all ; but Lady Helmsford was concerned and annoyed to observe his gravity and preoccupation. Not all her grace and coquetry could extract compliments or repartees. 'Tis true he purchased some costly trifles, which, with kindly gravity, he begged the Countess to accept, and which, he said, would perhaps remind her of their friendship when he was far away.

The Countess was startled, but could draw no explanation from him. In a day or two at furthest he would confide his plans to her, he said. With this she was obliged to be content. Monteiro, though determined to keep his word, felt that every hour gained was so much additional security for Maud. He dreaded, with a fear he knew was prophetic, to reveal his true feelings to Lady Helmsford; but it must be done.

Reluctantly the Countess bade him adieu when he handed her into her gilded coach, but he was again imperatively engaged; so with a troubled, yet not altogether mortified heart, Lady Helmsford progressed homewards, whiling away some time by paying a few necessary visits.

She was depressed and weary. Had she not been engaged to a party at Leicester House, she would have remained at home: this, however, was not to be avoided.

She retired as soon as she could, and was glad to find herself at home.

"Shortly after your ladyship left," said the solemn and penitent Hobson, who, after much intercession, had been permitted to continue

in office—"shortly after your ladyship left, a messenger from Mr. John Langley brought this letter."

It was a large important-looking missive, sealed with the Langley coat-of-arms in black wax. Lady Helmsford smiled scornfully as she opened it and read :

"MADAM,—I have from courtesy avoided intruding upon your ladyship; but I have kept myself informed of my ward's condition, and find I can, without offence or injury, insist upon her restoration to my custody. On the second day from this writing, I therefore give you notice, I shall personally remove her from your residence to my own. I trust you are sufficiently familiar with the law, as it affects guardian and ward, to cause no let or hindrance to this exercise of my right.

"I have the honour to be, Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"JOHN LANGLEY."

"Is Chifferil up?" asked Lady Helmsford when she had read this epistle.

“No, my lady ; he has been abed some time. He is troubled with an aching head.”

“What, another !” said Lady Helmsford. “If that tiresome man is going to have his brain confused with unaccountable headaches, he had better quit my service. Tell him as soon as he wakes in the morning that I wish Master Hervey the lawyer brought to me—early—mind you, Hobson.”

So saying, Lady Helmsford ascended to her room and Beville.

“Don Juan di Monteiro was here to-day, my lady,” said that astute waiting-woman.

“I know,” said the Countess absently.

“He paid a visit to Mr. Chifferil.”

“Yes, I know !” repeated her mistress ; and for a few moments she was reduced to the silent brushing and plaiting of her mistress’s dark tresses.

“Beville,” exclaimed Lady Helmsford, speaking out of her thoughts, “John Langley writes formally to reclaim his ward ; but I shall not let her go.”

“Indeed, my lady ! She was somewhat indisposed to-day—faint-like, a bad headache and tears.”

“So much the better,” said the Countess carelessly; “then she cannot be taken out of my house. I will call in two or three doctors to-morrow!” A pause ensued.

“Beville, give me a posset—something that will induce sleep.”

“La, madam! is not your ladyship well?”

“Well enough; but oppressed. I do not seem quite to understand what is going on around me—that attempt to carry off my niece now! What a mystery! But for that queer, stiff old soldier, it would have been done.”

“Just so, my lady. He is a mystery himself; the last sort of man I should take for a stockbroker.”

“A stockbroker,” said Lady Helmsford, yawning; “he is nothing of the kind. What put that into your head?”

“Because Mistress Sparrow said he was.”

“Mistress Sparrow!” cried the Countess, now fully waking up. “What does she know of him? You have something to tell—tell it!”

“Well, my lady, about a fortnight ago—you and Mistress Langley were away at my Lord

Chedworth's—Mistress Sparrow invited Master Chifferil and Mistress Dorothy to tea, not mentioning me in any way, because, I suppose, she thinks my room better than my company—not that I care—your ladyship's favour leaves me nothing to wish for; but, coming up the stair in the evening, I met Master Chifferil conducting this very Master D'Arcy into his study. So I just said to Mistress Sparrow next morning, 'You had strange company last night, ma'am;' and she says, 'Mistress Beville, a very genteel man from Change Alley, called to see Master Chifferil about shares—his stockbroker, in short!' Now, I happened to be in the passage the morning your ladyship rewarded him for his valour as he was turning into Mr. Chifferil's apartment, and knew him at once."

"This is passing strange, Beville," said Lady Helmsford; and she sat in silent thought for some minutes. "Say no more of this to any one save myself," she resumed. "I must question Chifferil."

"Your ladyship will not mention me in the matter?"

"Oh, rest easy on that score! Now 'tis

evident Monteiro holds communication with Chifferil; but wherefore? Shall I ask Chifferil? Go!" interrupting herself; "go, Beville, I need no more; leave me."

"Shall I ask Chifferil?" she said half aloud as she moved restlessly to and fro. "No; I will seek Juan's confidence first. If he loves me—if he will be true—no shadow of distrust shall arise on my part. He will come probably to-morrow; and I will open my heart and show him all the wealth I am ready to bestow upon him—even all that God has given me of beauty and riches, and tenderness and devotion. It is a grand dowry! yet I doubt——"

END OF VOL. II.

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